

LETTERS  
FROM A  
SURGEON  
OF THE  
CIVIL WAR



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LETTERS FROM A SURGEON  
OF THE CIVIL WAR







JOHN G. PERRY, MARCH, 1864

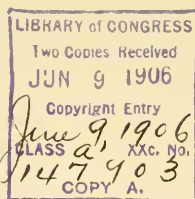
LETTERS  
FROM A SURGEON OF THE  
CIVIL WAR

COMPILED BY  
MARTHA DERBY PERRY  
*Author of "God's Light as it Came to Me"*

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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BOSTON  
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*My Husband and I dedicate these pages  
to our Nieces and Nephews, who though  
unborn in our early days, are now to us  
as if they had always been.*





## INTRODUCTION

**I**N a much weather-beaten trunk, which since the Civil War has travelled from one attic to another, have been carefully preserved a pair of shoulder-straps, a silver trefoil (the badge of the Second Corps of the Army of the Potomac), a green military sash, a well-worn workbag in which is still a big darning-needle with its half-used thread, numerous photographs of officers and localities, and a mass of letters.

From the end of the war until the present time these letters have remained unopened, and as the contents are mixed with much which is personal, it seems best to separate the war news from the rest and preserve it in a connected form which may prove of interest to the general reader.

## INTRODUCTION

Although there are gaps in the order of the correspondence, it is sufficiently connected to tell its own story.

John G. Perry of Boston, Mass., entered Harvard College in 1858, bearing with him a very youthful attachment; and in the undoubting judgment of youth, he and I, but boy and girl, in light-hearted gayety strolled one evening in the moonlight to consider the unsupportable length of time before living our lives together. First the present college term; then the Medical School and hospital service after, for even in childhood John was called "the little doctor." How indefinite it all seemed, — how far, far away the future! So we wandered on, regardless of all possible interference in our joy of life, and finally decided with but little, or I may say no hesitation, that the college life, then but a few months advanced, must be abandoned and the Scientific School, offering shorter terms and

## INTRODUCTION

collateral studies, adopted — for even then the medical course must follow. This was insurmountable ; and thus it was that the plan of action agreed upon by both was taken and earnestly continued until the spring of 1862, when the Government issued a call for volunteer contract assistant surgeons to serve in the military hospitals, to thus avoid detaching the commissioned assistant surgeons, who were needed on the fields of battle, from their respective regiments. The medical student in general belonged to the class best adapted to this service, and as it exactly fitted the needs of this particular one, he made application and was accepted.

Armed with authority from the Surgeon General of the State of Massachusetts (Dale), he started for the rendezvous, Fortress Monroe, where he was to report to Surgeon General Cuyler of that department.

## INTRODUCTION

Arriving there early one morning in company with many others, he was assigned to duty at the Chesapeake Hospital, formerly a seminary for young ladies, now the Indian School. Thus began his army experiences.

He had received permission to fit himself for his final examinations at the Boston Medical School by means of experience in army hospitals rather than through the usual routine of study, and much that is recorded in the following extracts was the result of this especial experience and study.

Acknowledgment is due the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of Massachusetts for permission to copy photographs in their collection.

MARTHA DERBY PERRY.

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# LETTERS

## FROM A SURGEON OF THE CIVIL WAR

### CHAPTER I

IN THE CHESAPEAKE HOSPITAL, FORTRESS  
MONROE

May 18th, 1862.

I AM sitting on the bed of a wounded Confederate, and using paper which he kindly offered me. As Sunday is generally the battle day, a medical graduate and I — he, by the way, as green as the foliage — had hurried through from Boston, hoping to reach here and be fairly at work by that time, but we found we were to be faced by many difficulties.

On our arrival I reported to the brigade surgeon, who promptly said there was neither room for me nor need of my services; still, he would do his best to find

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me work, and so politely bowed me to the door. This was a surprise, but, nothing daunted, I wandered aimlessly about, conscious, however, that in my pocket were official credentials which entitled me to the position of a government contract assistant surgeon; but there seemed so much red tape to unfold I could hardly find the right end to begin on.

Seeing the door of a cottage ajar, I entered, and found myself in the presence of a surgeon who was hard at work at the operating table, with a number of assistants in attendance. I watched them, the surgeon now and then eying me, as if to say, "What the devil are you doing here?" until in the first spare moment he asked my business. I gave him my name, told him what I had come for, and of the rebuff I had just received. At that he laughed, saying, "Never mind, you are just the man needed; we are overloaded with work and help is absolutely necessary; you shall

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share my quarters, and I will see that you are all right."

At mess that evening this good friend, Dr. Cushing, placed my seat beside his, and noticing that I felt a little anxious as to my possible reception by the brigade surgeon in charge, who had just entered, touched my knee, whispering, "If you don't notice him, he won't you; you're all right;" and so here I was at once installed for the time as Dr. Cushing's assistant.

This hospital is situated a short distance from the fort and on the Hampton Road. From where I am writing I see many ships of war riding at anchor in the stream, and also the very spot where the battle between the "Merrimac" and the "Monitor" took place. The building holds about seven hundred patients, and is now full; beside it is a cottage, and also some twenty tents, all occupied by sick and wounded Confederates. Dr. Cushing and I have entire charge of these men, who seem in good spirits, and

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are finer looking fellows than our own men here. I hear that the surgeon who served before me, while dressing a soldier's wound, laid the knife for a moment on the bed. The man seized it and made a lunge at the doctor, but instead of killing him, as he had intended, only ran it into his arm; whereupon the doctor instantly shot him. I suspect that the surgeon may have been rough in this instance, possibly intentionally so; I am careful, however, not to leave my instruments within reach of these prisoners, although they seem friendly and I do not fear them.

May 28th, 1862.

On one of the beds there lies, fast asleep, a Confederate surgeon, — a thoroughbred South Carolinian, who never, before the war, passed his State lines. He was captured with a number of others in the last engagement before Richmond, and as most of these men were wounded, he was detailed to care for them. Dressed entirely

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in Alabama homespun, — which is the ugliest snuff-colored stuff imaginable, — a broad-brimmed planter's hat covering his head, and stained with mud and blood from head to foot, the appearance of this officer when he first arrived was strange enough; but his face was bright and intelligent.

His greeting was unexpected: "I am delighted to meet men from Massachusetts, for I know I shall find in them intelligence and hospitality"; and he certainly did find the latter, for we furnished him throughout with clothes. He enjoys reading the Boston newspapers, and we have many pleasant chats together, for I find he is anxious to discover for himself the true state of affairs at the North, and whether the Yankee hordes are such bloodhounds as he has been taught to consider them. We seem to be making each other's acquaintance by simple good fellowship, and this, after all, is the only true way.

About sundown last night I was walk-

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ing on the beach quietly smoking my pipe, when I saw something which proved to be the body of a man floating on the water just at the edge of the shore. I pulled it up on the beach, covered it with seaweed, and then reported the incident. Meanwhile I returned to watch, walking up and down in the moonlight, or standing by the mound of seaweed, thinking of the poor nameless thing beneath, — thinking in ways that a month since were unknown to me. Since coming here death has faced me at every turn and in every conceivable form; yet my own future, my happiness, and my activity seem assured to me. Did that poor fellow look forward as confidently, I wondered? Possibly, and yet I cannot think he felt quite as safe as I. Then, was I homesick? Only the moon and the stars and the night could testify. . . .

The arrival of the provost marshal forced me back again to the existing facts. He recognized the body as that of

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one of the unfortunates who was drowned when the "Cumberland" was sunk by the "Merrimac."

June 15th, 1862.

This afternoon I collected all my convalescents in the kitchen of the cottage, placed them about a blazing fire, — for it was chilly and raining hard outside, — and started the singing of Methodist hymns. The music caught like an epidemic, and soon from every side came doctors, nurses, patients, negroes, until we had a rousing chorus. All of them sang with their whole souls, each one asking for his favorite hymn, and the concert ended with "Old Hundred." How I did enjoy it!

June 20th, 1862.

I hear from outside sources that I am working under contract and receiving full pay. It is not so. Congress has voted to pay all volunteer surgeons and assistant surgeons, but as I have neither yet taken

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my degree nor any examination for it, I am not included in that list. I hold the position of assistant surgeon, but not the pay.

June 23rd, 1862.

I have just returned from Norfolk, where I passed a day and night, and must tell you a little of my experience.

I reached there after about an hour's delightful sail, and by invitation went on board the "Minnesota," which lies just off the city, where I met many old friends and was hospitably entertained. In the afternoon I walked through some of the principal streets with several officers of the ship. Hundreds of negroes of every age and size watched us as we approached the wharf, grinning and showing their white teeth, and calling out: "By Golly! what big Yanks! Now you'll see de rebs run!" It was the hour when the houses were thrown open to the cool evening breeze, and as we looked through the grass-



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grown streets people were sitting on every piazza and doorstep. When they saw us coming there was much shifting of chairs and rearranging of skirts; some ran into the house and closed the door in our faces, then flew to the window to peep through the blinds, while others remained and turned their backs upon us. The children of one family were placed in a row and told to sing "Dixie" as we passed, which they did vociferously. I did not blame them; under similar circumstances, between all members of the human family there is a strong likeness. The same thing might occur anywhere.

Throughout the city guards were stationed at intervals like policemen; and I saw but one woman who was not in deep mourning.

There was a British frigate in the stream, lying beside the "Minnesota," and on Saturday night the English officers gave an entertainment on board to the Southern

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ladies, on which occasion the tables were dressed with Confederate flags. This is the way John Bull figures as a "neutral" in our affairs.

July 1st, 1862.

A new contingent to-day of sick and wounded; in fact, the men arrived in such numbers that we laid them on the grass and dressed their wounds there. I was obliged to perform an operation on one man and cut off two of his fingers. He sat up perfectly straight and did not wince a particle. I called him a "man," for he truly deserved the title, though he, poor fellow, was a mere boy of eighteen years.

Dr. Cushing, whom I assisted, has gone home, and I have entire charge of the cottage. The surgeon-general says he shall place the worst cases here, as it is the healthiest place there is. Think of the experience I shall gain!

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July 3rd, 1862.

A thousand wounded men arrived at the fort to-night, and to-morrow we shall probably have five hundred more. The work is endless.

Last night the heat was intense, and it seemed to me that a puff of pure air, free from the atmosphere of hospital wards, would be worth a kingdom; so, finding a few spare moments, I drew a mattress out on the cottage piazza, upon which I threw myself. The situation of our hospital is quite at the edge of the bluff over the water, so that we have the beautiful bay almost beneath us. The sun was just setting; sky and water were aglow with color, and while smoking my pipe I saw passing below a large force of transports loaded with soldiers whom I knew were commanded by General Burnside. I knew also that the President and General Scott were aboard. Bands were playing, flags flying,

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and all seemed gay and brilliant. On they sailed, with the sunlight upon them, on into the purple and the gray. "Ah!" I thought, solaced by my pipe, "behind me in the stifling wards is the night of that which has passed."

In one of my rooms lies a young fellow who was a prisoner on board the "Teaser," a Confederate gunboat, when she was captured on the James River. He said our gunboat came round the bend of the river without being seen, and threw a shell which passed directly through their vessel. The Confederates jumped overboard and swam for the shore, but, as he was afraid another shell would be thrown and blow her up, he lowered the flag, and in this way, most fortunately, made his escape. He tells me that our men found on board the "Teaser" a chart of the river, showing a passage through the obstructions which had been considered impassable by the Federal fleet.

One of my Confederate patients died

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to-day. He called me to his bed early this morning and said that he knew of his condition and was fully prepared to go, but there was one thing he wanted to do before the end, and that was to beg me to take his money and buy something which I could always keep in remembrance of him. He talked a great while about it, nor could I persuade him that he ought to divide the whole sum among the nurses who had been so kind to him. At one o'clock he died; you will realize the simple pathos in the last act of this poor fellow's history, when I tell you that his whole fortune amounted to less than fifty cents.

I have a plantation full of negroes under my charge across the river. Twenty are down with measles and twenty more with fever and ague. They are so confoundedly black that at first I found it difficult to discriminate the measles, but now I can see even the dirt. They always have very nice berry pies for me, and you may smile,

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but I really believe these berry pies will make a new man of me.

July 21st, 1862.

Four hundred released prisoners arrived to-day under flag of truce, and I assure you it was a most distressing sight. All of them were captured during the seven days' fight and had been prisoners but three weeks; yet they were starved, ragged, and filthy beyond description. Some had on only shirts; others drawers without shirts; and one wore simply a rough blanket over his naked body, yet all were either wounded or ill. Their wounds had been dressed only by what each could do for the other, and by making use of the water given them to drink. These men were released because the Confederates could not feed them. They never complain, talking with reluctance of their suffering while in prison, and always end by saying, "It was the best the enemy could do for us." My re-

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spect for human nature grows every day that I am here. I see its littleness, but its greatness makes far the deeper impression. The fortitude with which these men bear their hard lot is wonderful, but they are not the only heroes; I am constantly brought in contact with such courage in so many of the men, and such magnanimity, that I am fairly awed.

July 23rd, 1862.

I have many curious cases under my care. Some of the patients have been prisoners in Richmond, but although almost starved and their wounds dressed only by having water poured over them, they are all doing finely. One of them had a ball enter the very apex, or tip end, of his nose, and pass through his head, but he has not had a bad symptom and is now nearly well. Another man was struck by a ball in the forehead, whence it passed directly round his head under the skin,

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down and around his neck, making its exit close to the jugular vein and carotid artery. Two others were shot through the lungs, and yet all these fellows are doing finely. I account for it from the very fact of their enforced low diet.

July 25th, 1862.

Released prisoners say that a pestilence is feared in Richmond, where almost every house is turned into a hospital. If a man dies of fever his body is rolled in tar and smoked before burial. Corpses are buried without coffins and scarcely covered with earth. No names mark the grave, but simply the number which that one grave contains: "Sixty-five Confederates," "Twenty Federals," or "Yankees," etc.

August 1st, 1862.

I have been up to the army, — the Army of the Potomac, — and returned last night on the hospital boat with released prisoners. The trip was very interesting, though full



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of hard work. On our way we shelled the woods wherever we thought batteries might be planted. At one point we saw a suspicious horse and wagon, and off went a ten-inch shell screaming like a wild devil over the tops of the trees, while every one on the boat eagerly watched the effect. Suddenly there was a boom, and away flew the horse, stripped of all encumbrance by the trees and bushes, for all the world as if after the shell.

On my arrival at headquarters, at Harrison's Landing, after seeing all I could of camps and such matters, I stumbled into a hospital tent and there remained, sleeping that night under an ambulance, with my blanket for a pillow. The next morning orders came to start the released prisoners for Chesapeake Hospital and leave the worst cases there. I went on board the transport and, finding the men in a most pitiable condition, offered my services, which were immediately accepted.

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Some were almost naked; others without a rag on them. Poor fellows! Their wounds had not been dressed at all, and many were so weak from starvation they could barely walk. We were fifteen hours on board that boat without a morsel of food, and I could have almost eaten my tobacco. Yet not a word of complaint had been breathed by one of those brave men; the fact that they were released seemed sufficient compensation for all their suffering. We were finally transferred from the hospital boat to a tugboat which was loaded with bread.

August 4th, 1862.

Something is going on near the army, for gunboats have been moving up and down the river all day, and the big Union gun at the fort is booming throughout the surrounding country every half hour, making the very earth quake. The sound stirs in me an intense enthusiasm which I have instantly to stifle and suppress, for it is

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impossible to do more than I am now doing without my medical degree, which I must have before continuing the work much longer. The brigade surgeon says I must stay here, but the necessities of my future career force me back to my studies; although this surgical practice is of great value, yet I reach in it only two branches of the profession, and there are many others of vital importance. My cottage is full, in fact the whole hospital is crowded, and I am tired out, having no relief whatever from steady, close confinement.

I see by the papers that the North is in a ferment since the draft; that recruiting goes on everywhere, the streets being filled with detachments of troops parading and enticing men to enlist; and that merchants offer to keep open the positions of clerks who do enlist, and in some cases to continue their salaries while they are absent.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

NOTE: My husband became at this time so exhausted from overwork that he was obliged to leave suddenly for home. After a severe illness he studied for and successfully passed his final examinations at the Boston Medical School. We were then married, on March 18th, 1863, and on the same day he received his commission as assistant surgeon of the Twentieth Massachusetts Volunteers. On the 11th of April, 1863, he returned to the army.

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## CHAPTER II

### FIRST EXPERIENCE AS A COMMISSIONED OFFICER

WASHINGTON, April 13th, 1863.

OF all the disagreeable soldier-loafing places I was ever in, this is the worst. The city is rambling, the streets are dusty, unclean, filled with army officers of every grade and with privates. Were it not for the necessity of procuring passes, I would be at this moment with my regiment. Vague rumors concerning army movements have been flying through the city, and I am anxious to be on duty. There is no surgeon with the Twentieth now, so I expect to have full charge.

FALMOUTH, April 15th, 1863.

I have felt dazed and benumbed since my arrival here, probably from the effort

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I made before leaving home to suppress all gathering emotions. On the Sound boat I gave way, and I confess to behaving as I did when a child for the first time away from home. I cried as I did then, — all night long. I thought Harry Abbott in the berth above me was fast asleep, when suddenly he rolled over and looked down upon me. I felt for the moment thoroughly ashamed of myself, but he said nothing and settled back into his place, and then I heard him crying also. We had talked things over a bit, and I knew the poor fellow felt that he had seen his home for the last time, and that he had passed safely through so many battles he could hardly escape unscathed again. However, I am quite cheerful now, and manage when in camp with the other officers to wear even a smile; but I think if they could see me after I turn in at night the change of expression would astonish them.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

I am now quite settled in my camp quarters, feeling at times very like a raw recruit, but usually more like a veteran. We are pleasantly situated on the banks of a river overlooking the enemy's camp on the opposite shore, about two hundred yards away. The Confederates keep themselves pretty dark, only allowing us to see their pickets.

I am surgeon-in-charge nominally, as the regiment has not its full quota of men, but only acting surgeon in reality. Dr. Hayward, the former surgeon, is now surgeon-in-chief of the brigade, and has nothing more to do with the Twentieth, except that he lives and messes with us.

Last night I rode with some others to General Couch's headquarters, and was introduced to the great men there. Yes, it was a pleasant thing to do, and the afterglow of enjoyment was even more pleasant.

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April 23rd, 1863.

I have been off on picket duty and had my first experience at the outposts. It stormed most lustily the whole time. Fortunately, I had to remain but thirty-six hours, which is just half of the time of the men on guard. I set out from here on horseback, with pistol in holster, knapsack on my back; one man in front bearing my hospital knapsack filled with medicines, instruments, bandages, etc., and my servant — a fine, trusty little German who had served in many a war — carrying my rations and blankets. On my arrival at the post I reported to the commandant, and, this little formality over, looked for a suitable place to quarter myself.

The picket was stationed in what had been a dense forest before our troops arrived, although now the pioneer's axe had made a clearing for us. . . . Pickets are the outposts of the army. They are thrown



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out at certain distances to watch the enemy's movements, to prevent, if possible, any hostile activity, and to give warning of danger. In an army of this size picket duty requires about five thousand men, who are generally placed within a short distance of the pickets of the opposing force, and are divided into parties of nine, each commanded by an officer. Behind these are placed groups of men in reserve, who relieve the others at intervals, and in case of attack assist in keeping the enemy at bay. Every picket has a surgeon, who remains in the rear with the reserve. He is selected from the regiments by the surgeon-in-chief of the division. A sentinel's duty is arduous, especially to a raw recruit; he must be persistently on the alert, in spite, often, of almost overwhelming drowsiness from the weary monotony of his duty and the stillness of his surroundings. A soldier who had never been under fire once described to me his absolute terror

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at first finding himself one dark night on picket duty. He said the well-worn phrase "my hair stood on end" never had conveyed to him much meaning, but on this night he knew it to be absolutely true. It seemed to him that an enemy lurked behind every bush, and when a shot did cut the air he distinctly felt his cap rise with his bristling hair.

To return to my story. With the aid of my servant I built a little covering of logs and pine boughs, and then, after an enjoyable breakfast of coffee, hardtack, and cold salt pork, lighted my pipe and strolled down to the outposts to take a view of Johnny Reb.

The Rappahannock separates the opposing armies, the picket of each being within a stone's throw of the other, even at the widest part of the river. The water rushes by over immense rocks, which sometimes rise above the surface; the banks are thickly wooded, and in their midst rise

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rude huts and earthworks. I sat a long time watching the Confederates, wondering as to the outcome of the struggle, trying to place myself in their attitude and to look at things from their standpoint. These reflections were often interrupted by shouts from the enemy's pickets across the river to ours, which always drew a curt reply from a Yankee sentinel.

Rain soon drove me back to my hut, and then it poured in earnest, streaming through every crack and crevice. In half an hour there was an inch of water covering the floor. Wrapped in my blanket, I fell into a deep sleep, and awoke about four in the afternoon to find that the rain had ceased. Later, however, the storm returned with redoubled strength and made the woods near by roar with its fury. In an interval of calm I built a fire to cook my supper, thinking it would be the only opportunity, but before it was ready down

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came the rain again and put an end to it all.

Again I lay in my blanket, but at midnight the commanding officer awoke me to beg a shelter from the storm. No sooner had we settled ourselves to sleep than we were aroused by a messenger from headquarters, ordering us to lie on our arms, as an attack was expected.

I awoke at daybreak benumbed with cold. At noon the drum beat, my horse was brought me, and I returned to the old quarters again, after my first experience as picket surgeon.

April 26th, 1863.

This is the second Sunday I have been with the army, and the third away from home. It is a beautiful day, without a cloud in the sky, and I have had a delightful five hours' ride with the Doctor and Major Macy. We rode the entire way by the river, enjoying intensely the lovely scenery, and went as far as the

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extreme right of our picket, halting on the brow of a hill overhanging the river, and from which we looked directly into the camp of the enemy and down upon their outposts. Last night a number of us rode over to General Sedgwick's headquarters to see some of his staff, and had a jolly time. The General ordered out the band and gave us a parade of his corps.

April 29th, 1863.

The last twelve hours have been very exciting. All the army has moved excepting our division, which is left to protect the town and deceive the enemy. The regiment is picketing along the river for four or five miles, and we expect marching orders about dark. Our division crossed the river just below Fredericksburg with little opposition. We can hear the firing now quite distinctly, and each one wonders what part he is to take in the ball.

Last night the brigade band serenaded

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us, and our room was so filled with generals and subordinate officers that some of us sat on the floor. . . . In all this stir and excitement I listened to the conversation about me, saying little; so much of me was far away, wishing, as I always do wish at such times, that I were not alone. But there is a strange romance in it all.

April 30th, 1863.

Still here in Falmouth. We are in the centre of the Union line and are expected to hold this place and prevent the Confederates from cutting off supplies or dividing our forces. They have taken to their rifle-pits, undoubtedly anticipating an attack, and are so near that I can see their faces with the poorest opera-glass. The moon shines gloriously to-night, and when we march it will be right into the enemy's country; but the loafing about, waiting for orders to start, the suspense and delay, are almost unendurable.

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FALMOUTH, May 1st, 1863.

The Government has lately kept back the mail, so that this afternoon, when letters came in a heap, I gave such a shout of joy that it startled Dr. Hayward and Macy out of a sound sleep; they thought me mad. How I have enjoyed my letters, and how I drank in every word! I think that when two people are separated, if the one absent is occupied, the lot of the one left at home is the harder; but if the one absent is not occupied, I think *his* lot must be the harder.

The sun has set, the moon is resplendent, and if orders should come to-night the march would be enjoyable. Everything is packed and my horse saddled, but the waiting is very trying. To-day we have heard firing on all sides, and two hundred prisoners captured by our forces have just passed. There was a little excitement this afternoon, when a private

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who was crazy drunk rushed into our quarters, insulted us, and attempted to strike Harry Abbott, who happened to be standing near. After a hard struggle we conquered him. He will be severely punished for such folly.

FALMOUTH, May 5th, 1863.

Yesterday the regiment was in the city of Fredericksburg; to-day it is back in its old quarters at Falmouth, and I am in the same house and room. We have had two days of pretty hard fighting; the first day winning everything, the second losing all we had gained.

On Saturday night we broke camp and marched to the Lacy house, where we expected to cross the river by pontoon-bridge. No bridge having been built, I managed to sleep very well in a gutter, forming a half circle, with my head on one side and feet on the other. In the morning we crossed the bridge that had





VIEW OF FREDERICKSBURG FROM ABOVE THE TOWN OF FALMOUTH

*From a Sketch by Surgeon Hayward*



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been finally put together during the night, and easily marched into Fredericksburg, which was not only deserted by the Confederate army, but by most of the able-bodied inhabitants as well.

This attack on the city and its heights was a "blind" to hold the enemy in check while General Hooker should cross the river above, and this is the way it was done. We formed on the edge of the stream, hidden from view of the opposing forces, and to the west of the city, and in line of battle climbed the bank and faced a broad open plain which extended back several hundred yards towards Mayre's Heights, where were the earthworks and rifle-pits of the Confederates. All of us looked for a sweeping fire the instant we should appear on the plain, but as none came, a faint hope arose in my inexperienced mind that the heights were deserted; for this coming battle was my first, and ideas concerning it were very vague. Of one fact I was

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sure, that until something did take place, I wished to ride in front of the line with Colonel Macy. While crossing the plain we noticed an officer behind the first breastwork, mounted on a gray horse such as Colonel Hall rode, the commanding officer of the brigade. Macy said he was Colonel Hall. As we drew near, a flame of fire suddenly burst forth, and a solid shot whizzed over our heads.

“Dismount,” cried Macy, “and let your horse go!”

We threw ourselves flat on the ground, as did also the men in line, and so remained until the firing ceased. Then came the order “Charge!” and the line swept by me, I recognizing for the first time that my place was at the rear and not at the front. The Confederates made but little resistance, abandoning their entrenchments and retreating before our line until the order “Halt!” was given to our men. Later we returned to the Confederate

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earthworks, beyond which we had chased the enemy for over a mile.

The Twentieth Massachusetts was then detailed to occupy the city of Fredericksburg as a provost guard. Meantime I searched for my mare, "Bessie," and found her securely tethered with Macy's horse on the bank of the river, in charge of an orderly. Mounting, I rode into the city, and there saw the necessity of a provost guard, for the houses had been pillaged, and our men were masquerading through the streets in women's attire, — nightcaps and gowns, silk dresses, etc.

I selected a nice brick house for my hospital. On entering the parlor of this deserted mansion I was startled to see a Union officer, in rank a major, stretched upon the floor, and quite dead. How came he here before the arrival of his companions, and, if a spy, why that dress? I searched the body for a name, or for any sign that might give a clue to his fate, but

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in vain; everything was shrouded then, as now, in impenetrable mystery.

That night the enemy were strongly reinforced, and the next morning our men had the mortification of being driven back from the earthworks into the city, and losing that which they had so splendidly gained the day before. More than this, our force was now so small that we could do nothing but fall back upon Falmouth without striking a blow. Yesterday, therefore, we simply held ourselves in readiness to receive an attack, but none came. The enemy kept up a sort of duel with our skirmishers all day long, which wearied the men almost to death. Occasionally a shell dropped into the city, and sharpshooters had the range of many of the streets, making it extremely dangerous to move about.

I had to run the gauntlet many times, and on one of my expeditions heard a woman's piercing screams from a house

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by the way. I rushed in, and found an elderly woman of immense size in a violent fit of hysterics. She was seated in a rocking-chair, swaying back and forth, evidently beside herself with terror, screaming, moaning, and crying. While I did what I could in the hurry of the moment to reassure the poor thing, a shell came whizzing through the air above, exploding as it fell into the square in front of us. Over went the old woman backwards, turning a complete somersault, chair and all. For a moment there was a convulsion of arms and legs, and then such shrieks that it seemed to me the din outside was nothing to that within. I gathered her together as quickly as I could, — it was difficult to find any particular part to hold on to, — and when she had wit and breath enough to answer, asked for the other inmates of the house; vague and muffled sounds told me they were near, and when she pointed with her finger downwards, sure enough,

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I found them in the cellar huddled together, both whites and negroes. It seemed that the old woman was too large to manage the cellar stairs, and they, supposing from all the uproar that she was killed, were every moment expecting a like fate for themselves. However, they soon ventured up, and I hurried back to my hospital.

This morning, knowing by the Confederate yells that the enemy had been still more strongly reinforced, an attack upon us seemed certain. . . . I have never, since I was born, heard so fearful a noise as a rebel yell. It is nothing like a hurrah, but rather a regular wildcat screech. Each shell that burst over the heads of our men was followed by one of these yells, and the sound was appalling.

FALMOUTH, May 6th, 1863.

Sad and discouraging news comes to us this morning. General Hooker, who was



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behind Fredericksburg, expecting to fight the great battle there, has been flanked and driven back to the river, which he is now recrossing. The Confederates are pushing him hard, and he will find it difficult to save his whole army. I can distinctly hear the bursting of the enemy's shells as they pour upon him. . . . One of General Sedgwick's aides has just come in, and says General Hooker is doing his utmost to save his forces from utter rout and demoralization.

May 7th, 1863.

We have marching orders, and must again cross the river and attack the same fortifications before Fredericksburg which were taken so gallantly last Sunday. General Hooker has been obliged to fall back upon this side of the river, and is now quartered with his troops just where they were before he moved. Below Fredericksburg General Sedgwick crossed the river, drove the enemy from their heights, and

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

marched his troops in behind their army, — a most spirited manoeuvre. The Twentieth formed a part of General Couch's corps, which attacked the enemy's centre, striking through Fredericksburg, and fighting the Confederates in their own rifle-pits and fortifications. The Federal forces charged, were driven back twice, rallied the third time, and carried the day, finally chasing the enemy three miles. General Hooker sent word to hold the city till he could reach it, but he being defeated and driven back, the Union troops were forced to retreat and yield all they had won. . . . The latest news is that General Hooker is to cross the river once again; his troops are disheartened, but they will fight well, if only to wipe out the mortification they now feel. The old Twentieth was complimented in a special order for its behavior and bravery in the last fight. I feel as proud as if I had fought, won, and deserved to share its honor.

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The reports in the Northern papers of our army affairs are not reliable. They dupe and encourage the public by false statements. The only paper allowed within the lines of the army is the "Washington Chronicle," a government organ.

May 14th, 1863.

There is no sign of movement; the days pass, but nothing is done. The whole army cries for "Little Mac," who, if he returned to-day, would be greeted with the heartiest cheers that ever filled the air. This is the opinion of every man in the regiment, and they have all served under him.

The heat is intense now, and my hair is cut so short that my head looks as if it were trying to grow through.

May 23rd, 1863.

This morning, when riding, I came to a ditch filled with water. My horse was walking quite slowly, but, as he is a great

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jumper, he suddenly concluded to jump that ditch. Unluckily his feet slipped in the mud and he went in headforemost. The stream was deep, and such a wetting as I got! My boots were so full of water that I felt several inches taller, and I swallowed mud enough to fill the ditch. My horse tried to scramble out on his knees, but fortunately was not hurt.

June 6th, 1863.

Yesterday morning the Confederates disappeared from the heights of Fredericksburg, after having spent the night in burning their camps. In the afternoon, about three o'clock, we could see and hear tremendous firing on the left, where General Sedgwick crossed the river before the last battle. I ordered my horse and rode down there, as it was only a mile, and found we had several batteries of field-pieces sweeping the broad plain on the other side of the river. When I arrived,

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General Sedgwick was building a bridge, which was soon ready for his troops to cross. Skirmishers were thrown out to advance towards the heights, as before. I stood just over the batteries, and when our skirmishers took the enemy's rifle-pits, which were all along the shore, I could see the Confederates retreating until they reached an abrupt chasm where the pits ended. Into this they plunged, rushing up its further side to reach the next line of pits. On the rise where I was standing was planted a battery of very large guns; while the Confederates were running through the chasm our men brought one of these guns to bear upon them, throwing a shell directly in their midst. The effect was horrible, and I turned away, unable to endure the sight.

On my return to camp I found we were to march at sunrise. The men were singing and cheering, and the officers were in fine spirits. Late that evening, when we

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were quite ready, — knapsacks filled and blankets rolled, — the order was revoked. Men's faces dropped, and all swore silently or otherwise. The whole thing may have been a demonstration on our part to discover the whereabouts of the Confederates, but it was awfully exasperating. They have been threatening our right, frightening the people in Washington out of their wits, so that possibly this apparent movement of ours was intended to divert them and draw them back. I hear that in Alexandria rifle-pits and trenches are dug in the streets of the city, and every night the planks on the long bridge which runs into Washington are taken up.

Again I hear firing on the left, but do not dare to leave to see the fight for fear that orders to march may come while I am away. I rather suspect the brigade will be left here to guard the railroad, but I trust not, for if there is to be a fight we all want to share it. Our men feel

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great pride in going into battle, for they always fight well and usually are complimented by their general.

FALMOUTH, June 7th, 1863.

While I was writing my last letter orders arrived to prepare to march, and so we have been preparing ever since; but the word "start" does not come. Night before last the orders were that we should have the wagons packed and ready to move at four o'clock the next morning, which meant turning the sick men out of the hospitals and setting everybody to work, but at three o'clock A. M. a second order countermanded the first. Then everything which had been taken down had to be put up again. Last night was a repetition of the one before.

General Sedgwick has gained a crossing below us on the left, and has thrown one division across the river, but they do nothing but tease the enemy. The latter have

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

a large force of men and guns and can at any moment drive General Sedgwick into the water. Why General Hooker ordered him there is a wonder to everybody, and why the Confederates do not open fire upon him is a still greater cause for amazement. Last night they did try the range of their heavy guns, and in less than five minutes obliged him to strike all his tents and order the men into rifle-pits.

June 15th, 1863.

At last! To-morrow we move, — for what point I know not. Our brigade is to cover the rear, which is a post of honor, and, of course, we appreciate the compliment.



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### CHAPTER III

#### 'AN ACCIDENT AND ITS CONCLUSION

**O**N the 15th of June, at daylight, when the march began, the heat was frightful, and so many men dropped from the ranks that I was incessantly engaged with the dead and dying, and consequently fell farther and farther to the rear. To prevent the enemy's cavalry from following the Union army, its wake was covered with trees felled by the rear-guard. Guerillas infested the woods on all sides, and, realizing the danger of being separated from the rest of the command, I mounted my horse to catch up with the regiment. At first I tried to jump the debris, but finding this impossible, dismounted, so as to lead my horse over the obstructions, which cut telegraph

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wires rendered extremely dangerous. I placed my foot upon one of these wires, that the horse might more easily step over it, instead of which she jumped, caught her foot in the wire, slipped it from under my boot, the wire striking her in the belly. To free herself she kicked and struck me in the leg. The excited animal was off in a moment, I falling amid the brush. Seeing the sole of my boot facing me, I knew what had happened, — a multiple fracture. Faintness soon crept over me, but I managed to drag myself to the side of the road before losing consciousness. From this condition I was aroused by seeing Colonel Macy's face bending over me, and hearing him say, "Old fellow, your horse made straight for the Twentieth, and knowing something was wrong, I hunted you up."

Being well aware of the great risk the Colonel had braved for me, I told my story in a few words, begging him to hurry back to the regiment and send an ambulance im-

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

mediately. I very quickly found myself lying on the floor of one, rattling over every sort of obstruction, the mules forced to their utmost speed to avoid capture. The suffering was intense, but we finally reached the rear of the army and moved along with the rest until night compelled a halt.

When the mules were unharnessed and tied to the wheels, they amused themselves by gnawing my big military boot, which I had slit to give room to the swelling leg; so, what with pain and nerve exhaustion, I felt myself in a sorry plight. As the army continued its retreat, my only food was hardtack, and often a piece of soft bread picked up from the roadside. The next day after my accident a wounded officer was placed beside me in the ambulance, who died during the following night, and to add to my torments, the body of this poor man incessantly rolled over and against me, rendering my condition abso-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

lutely unendurable. I finally managed to send a message by an orderly to General Hancock, telling him of the state of things, and asking for a pass to Washington. This the General immediately sent, with the information that as soon as the division struck the railroad I would receive transportation.

The next helpful news was that a freight car bound for Alexandria had been found; that it was partially loaded with shelled corn, and if I felt that it would be possible to lie upon that, I could be carried along. In comparison with the floor of the ambulance and its attending vicissitudes, the exchange seemed to my mind simply heavenly. Later I was laid upon the corn, the door of the car slid back sufficiently for ventilation, and in the fresh ease and comfort I sank into instantaneous sleep, so deep and profound that my first waking consciousness was that of absolute stillness, and the gradual realiza-

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tion of neither sound nor motion. When thoroughly awake, I peered out through the narrow opening of the door, saw that it was daylight, that the car had been side-tracked, and I, apparently, forgotten.

Presently I thought I heard a footstep, though a very light one, and with all the strength I could muster I shouted, then raised my head to watch the effect.

Amid the cars I saw, bobbing up and down here and there, the top of a green parasol. Again I called, and immediately the parasol was at the door of the car, and under it the astonished face of a little old woman. Where she came from, or what her business there, I cared not, for here was help, I was sure of that. Was this Alexandria, and would she send to the Mansion House Hospital for an ambulance? Yes, this was Alexandria, and she would gladly do the errand herself; and so quick was the response that I soon found myself on a stretcher in a large vacant ward.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

My poor leg was still tied up in the army boot, which, when removed, revealed a black and angry-looking limb. In the one word, "gangrene," the surgeon pronounced its fate, but I said "No!" — that its appearance and condition were due to dust, heat, and inflammation. Nevertheless the surgeon answered, "It is gangrene and the leg must be amputated!"

"It shall not be amputated," I replied; whereupon the surgeon told me that he was the only one who had authority there, and so left me.

I was determined to save that leg, and to avoid any serious conflict, felt that I must, as it were, escape from the hospital. I called one of the nurses to me, told the circumstances, and asked her to find two trusty men, whom I would pay liberally, to carry me on my stretcher to a steam-boat bound for Washington. This she agreed to do; and that very evening I

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was carefully lifted through a window and placed on the deck of a boat which was to sail in the morning. I was unmolested by captain or crew, my shoulder straps apparently being sufficient guarantee for my rights as a passenger. On arriving in Washington, I hired men to carry me to the Army Square Hospital, where my pass or permit was asked for; but I had none, General Hancock's pass having been left with the driver of the ambulance. I was then told that without a permit I was entitled neither to accommodation nor rations.

“ Well,” was my answer, “ if this is the case, I can but write my own permit and find my own rations, but enter I must ”; and turning to my bearers, I ordered them to carry me in, forthwith being laid in the nearest ward, which was filled with privates. However, I was safe, and still in possession of my leg, so what did it matter?

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

Exhausted from pain, fatigue, and hunger, the longing for at least a smoke grew so intense that it seemed to bring the opportunity. A kindly somebody brought me a cigar, but just at that moment the nurse who had refused to take me in appeared upon the scene. "Doctor, Doctor," she cried, "it is against the rules to smoke here; you must not do it!" but I quietly puffed away at my cigar, saying, "I will take this responsibility also." She looked severely at me, hesitated as to the management of this big, broken-legged man, then with a settled countenance, and the parting shot that she should "report me," hurried away.

At length the door opened again to admit the head surgeon, who entered, followed by the irate nurse. He was a bright, genial-looking man, who instantly made me feel that all would be well. "What is all this about?" he said, turning to me; and I, patting the stretcher by my



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

side, answered, "Sit here, Doctor, a moment, and listen."

After hearing the various experiences through which I had passed, including my entrance into the hospital without official permit, the refusal of rations, and, more than all, of a smoke, the surgeon laughingly said, "Smoke all you wish, Doctor; make yourself as comfortable as possible here, and as you wish to be sent home to New York, I will see that you reach there at the earliest moment."

A few days later, by the aid of the Sanitary Commission and Mr. E. F. Bowditch, my lifelong friend and later brother-in-law, who in response to a telegram from me secured a berth in a hospital car, I was transferred to it upon a stretcher. The jolting of the car was naturally painful to an unset limb, yet did its good work by breaking the adhesions which of necessity had formed. On our safe arrival in New York City no ambulance could be

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

found, so that finally my stretcher was placed in a covered wagon, in which I reached home. My wife and I were strangers in the city, and one physician after another was called to set my poor long-suffering leg, but each left with the same response, "I am not a surgeon-doctor; call this one and that." At last, in sheer desperation, I asked my wife's brother to find splints, plaster, and bandages, and we, together, set my leg with good and permanent results.

# OF THE CIVIL WAR

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NEW YORK RIOT

*(Described by Mrs. Perry)*

**A**FTER this experience my husband was laid up at home for several weeks, waiting with keen impatience for the time when he could return to his regiment. This quiet period of inaction was, however, broken by the New York Riot, which took place in the month of July, 1863. The disturbance was due to the draft made necessary by the dearth of volunteers, and also to the fear among the Irish that the negroes at the South would come North and crowd them out of their work. While it lasted the foreign, and especially the Irish, element of the city had complete control. For more than a week lawlessness reigned supreme, and though

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

our experience was far less severe than that of many others, those who were not born when these events took place may be interested to read quotations from a letter written by me to relatives in Boston.

NEW YORK, July 20th, 1863.

Strange to say, although we knew of the intense excitement in the city and heard that many of our neighbors had been up every night, too terrified to rest, we had no idea of personal danger.

On the first day of the riot, in the early morning, I heard loud and continued cheers at the head of the street, and supposed it must be news of some great victory. In considerable excitement I hurried downstairs to hear particulars, but soon found that the shouts came from the rioters who were on their way to work. About noon that same day we became aware of a confused roar; as it increased, I flew to the window, and saw rushing up Lexington

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Avenue, within a few paces of our house, a great mob of men, women, and children; the men, in red working shirts, looking fairly fiendish as they brandished clubs, threw stones, and fired pistols. Many of the women had babies in their arms, and all of them were completely lawless as they swept on.

I drew the cot upon which John was lying, his injured leg in a plaster cast, up to the window, and threw his military coat over his shoulders, utterly unconscious of the fact that if the shoulder straps had been noticed by the rioters they would have shot him, so blind was their fury against the army. The mass of humanity soon passed, setting fire to several houses quite near us, for no other reason, we heard afterward, than that a policeman, whom they suddenly saw and chased, ran inside one of the gates, hoping to find refuge. The poor man was almost beaten to death, and the house, with those adjoining, burned.

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At all points fires burst forth, and that night the city was illuminated by them. I counted from the roof of our house five fires just about us, but our own danger in all this tumult, strangely enough, never crossed our minds.

The next day was a fearful one. Men, both colored and white, were murdered within two blocks of us, some being hung to the nearest lamp-post, and others shot. An army officer was walking in the street near our house, when a rioter was seen to kneel on the sidewalk, take aim, fire, and kill him, then coolly start on his way unmolested. I saw the Third Avenue street car rails torn up by the mob. Throughout the day there were frequent conflicts between the military and the rioters, in which the latter were often victorious, being partially organized, and well armed with various weapons taken from the stores they had plundered.

I passed the hours of that dreadful night

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listening to the bedlam about us; to the drunken yells and coarse laughter of rioters wandering aimlessly through the streets, and to the shouts of a mob plundering houses a block away, from which, as we heard later, the owners barely escaped with their lives. I must confess that as I lay in the darkness amid the uproar, there was some feeling of shelter, yes, and even rest, in having the sheet well drawn over my head, and this with no sense of heat or suffocation, although the mercury stood very high.

The next morning's news was that the rioters were murdering the colored people wherever found, and that there was no limit to the atrocities committed against them. Hurrying to the kitchen, I found our colored servants ghastly with terror, and cautioned them to keep closely within doors. One of them told me that she had ventured out early that morning to clean the front door, and that the passing

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

Irish, both men and women, had sworn at her so violently, saying that she and her like had caused all the trouble, that she finally rushed into the house for shelter.

Now that I began to realize our danger, I tried with all my power to keep John in ignorance of it, for in his absolutely disabled condition the situation was most distressing. The heat was intense; and during the morning I sat in his room behind closed window-shutters, continually on the alert to catch every outside noise, while watching the hot street below in the glare of sunlight. On the steps of an opposite house I recognized a policeman, whose usual beat was through our street, sitting in his shirt sleeves without any sign of uniform, looking rough and disorderly, and talking to the strolling bands of rioters. I wondered whether he was doing detective service, or whether he had joined the lawless mob. Men and women passed



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with all sorts of valuables taken from plundered houses.

Later in the day a crowd of boys arrived with stout sticks, threw stones at our house, called for the "niggers," and then rushed on. This added to my alarm, I having heard that a rush of street arabs always preceded an attack by the mob. Parties of Irishmen passed and pointed to our house, and a boy ran by shouting, "We'll have fun up here to-night."

My heart felt overloaded as I looked at John in his helpless condition. What were we to do? Even if he were able to be moved, there was no way of accomplishing it. No amount of money could hire a conveyance; neither cars nor omnibuses were running; there was absolutely nothing to do but wait for events to guide us. During these anxious hours the realization of the meaning of personal safety grew upon me. I saw, in looking over my past, that I had accepted this great blessing all

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my life without a moment's conscious gratitude. If our lives were now spared should I ever again be so unmindful?

When one of my brothers returned to lunch and reported the increasing strength of the mob, I told him of all I had seen and heard during the morning, and we considered the question of barricading the street doors and windows, but soon decided that it was useless. He then went to the police station to ask for information and help, but before leaving placed a ladder against the wall of our back yard, so that in case of attack the servants might, by this means, escape to the adjoining premises, and from there to the next street. At the police station my brother was told that, through one of their detectives who had been working in our street all the morning, they had learned that their station and also our house, with the one opposite, were to be attacked and burned that night, all being in close proximity.

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The police had been already plundered of most of their firearms, and needed all their force to defend themselves. They could do literally nothing for us, but recommended barricading the front entrances to the house as well as we could.

The afternoon wore on, and, feeling somewhat restless from the helpless inactivity at such a time, I wandered into the different rooms of the house, looked at our valuables, locked some in trunks, tucked a few trinkets and a roll of bills into my gown, and then returned to the window-seat, feeling a little weighted with value, but better satisfied.

The city became frightfully still, and this silence was broken only by occasional screams and sharp reports of musketry.

By this time John knew pretty clearly the condition of things. He had heard the shouts in the street, and in spite of my efforts surmised the rest. The stillness grew so intense that the very atmos-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

phere seemed a part of it, for not a breath of air stirred. As our landlord lived in the same block with us, it occurred to my brothers that in case of an attack we might escape over the roofs and pass down the skylight of his house, knowing that the very urgency of the situation would enable us to carry John with us somehow; but this privilege was refused, as the man said it might endanger his family.

My brothers were calling at every house in the ward to induce the occupants to meet at the police station, armed with whatever weapon each could find, in order to organize and patrol the streets through the night. Meantime, our servants were instructed to remain downstairs, and not to run until the house was actually attacked, then to rush for the ladder in the back yard; and I was to cover their retreat by hiding the ladder.

These plans and directions seemed to me at the time perfectly reasonable and pos-

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sible, but afterwards, when all was safe and quiet, I had many a laugh over the way I was to tear about that house while the mob was bursting in the front door, — my husband up in the third story, and I, after pushing the negroes over the fence, scampering about to hide the ladder in some unknown place.

At ten o'clock that evening we were left alone in absolute darkness, as the police sent word that light would increase our danger. John lay quietly on his cot, while I again sat by the window to catch the slightest sound, and in the stillness heard a voice in the adjoining house say, "There 's always a calm before a storm," which, under the circumstances, was not encouraging; I have never forgotten the impression it made on me.

But soon our hearts were gladdened by the sound of the patrol passing our house at regular intervals, and although we were in the third story from the street, the still-

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ness was so intense that we could distinctly hear their conversation. Suddenly rapid pistol shots broke the spell; then came a great rush up the avenue in the darkness, John's voice saying very calmly, "Here they come." The absolute quiet within us both at the time from its very intensity overpowered all surface emotion. However, the noise proved to be a false alarm, and again came the silence.

Time after time we had these shocks; now the mob seemed almost upon us; then at a distance. What did it mean? Finally the tumult seemed to culminate a block away, and gradually we felt that, for the time at least, our lives were safe. As soon as the strain was over I realized how tense had been my calm, and, as we sat together in the darkness, I must confess to enjoying a comfortable little weep and being much strengthened by it. Such is — myself!

During the night my brothers returned, and told us that just as the officers at the

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police station had agreed to combine with the citizens and patrol that vicinity, a man rushed in crying that the mob was murdering some one in our street. The whole force formed and charged up the avenue, but met only scattered bands of rioters, and these slunk away as the files of organized men appeared, stretching in solid lines from sidewalk to sidewalk, as the rioters supposed, fully armed. We heard afterward that this steadfast army, looking so formidable, while so feeble in reality, was all that saved us; that our house and the one opposite, as well as the police station, were distinctly marked by the mob for that night's work.

The ensuing day was still an anxious one, but as it passed and nothing happened, we began to feel at ease again. By this time the city was full of troops, and finally the riot was quelled by firing canister into the mob. As we heard the heavy reports and responding yells, it seemed to me that I

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knew something of the horrors of war. To-morrow the authorities continue the draft, and I trust they will enforce it in spite of every obstacle.

Before closing this letter, I must tell you of some amusing things which happened when the citizens met at the police station, as related by my brothers on their return, and which even then gave us all a hearty laugh.

They told us that the meeting was a large one, and was called to order at seven o'clock. A vigilance committee was immediately formed for mutual protection, and a chairman and secretary selected. Resolutions were drawn up, various plans were proposed, and among others that of telegraphing to Albany for muskets, — a proposition which a man of some sense suggested was worse than useless, as the mob might be upon them at any moment, reminding them also that the citizens there collected probably knew little of firearms,



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so that any guns would be easily seized by the mob and turned against themselves. It was then decided that the citizens could best aid the police by patrolling the streets and reporting at the Station whenever rioters were seen.

A motion was finally made, that in order to know on whom to depend, a list of the names and residences of those present should be taken. This was done with great formality and the loss of much valuable time, each man signing his name, when quite a bombshell was thrown into their midst by the suggestion that spies might be among them. At this the whole assembly seemed to separate one from the other, every man eying his neighbor with sharp suspicion. The secretary, who had been most zealous in calling the meeting, yet whose nervousness was evidently on the increase, suggested in a scarcely audible voice that if the list of names just signed should fall into the hands of the mob, the

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fate of each member would undoubtedly be sealed. Might it not be wiser, after all, to tear it up?

Great confusion followed these remarks; some laughed; others scoffed; but a terrified exclamation from the poor secretary silenced all. White and shaking, he pointed to the windows, which every one then saw were filled with eager, listening faces. The secretary hesitated no longer, but rushed for the list, tore it in pieces, slammed down the windows, locked the door, and even turned out the lights, before the astonished citizens knew what was happening. Then, when a mad rush for the door was imminent, as the mob outside was preferable to the suffocation and darkness within, a great commotion was heard, — pounding of fists on the door, and shouts to the police that the mob was on its way there, and murdering a man in the next street. The confusion and excitement were indescribable; even the secretary forgot

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himself. Each man seized the club which had been provided, and soon the whole force was marching up the avenue.

NOTE. My husband's leave of absence was for ninety days; at the end of that period, being eager to return to his regiment, he left for Washington on crutches. As nothing of importance occurred from the time of the riot until his departure, in September, I once more let his letters speak for themselves.

# LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

## CHAPTER V

### RETURN TO THE ARMY

WASHINGTON, September 23rd, 1863.

**H**ERE I am, scribbling again.  
As I entered this morning the office of the surgeon-general to report for active service, I felt some anxiety lest in my disabled condition I might be detailed to the invalid corps, and in consequence obliged to linger near Washington; so I hid my crutches under the stairs outside his door, and managed with great difficulty to walk across the room without them.

The surgeon, after examining my leg very critically, as if doubtful of its complete recovery, said, "Are you sure, Doctor, you are equal to active service?"

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“ Yes,” I answered, “ I feel quite sure,” and he allowed me to pass. I hope now to rejoin my old comrades to-morrow afternoon or evening.

CULPEPER, September 26th, 1863.

I left Washington yesterday at ten o'clock A. M., and, on reaching Culpeper at five, heard that the regiment was nine miles out in the advance. How it was to be reached I was not informed. Having eaten nothing since breakfast, I wandered about the town in quest of food, and finally struck the quarters of the Sanitary Commission, where I was provided with a hearty meal of hardtack and bitter tea.

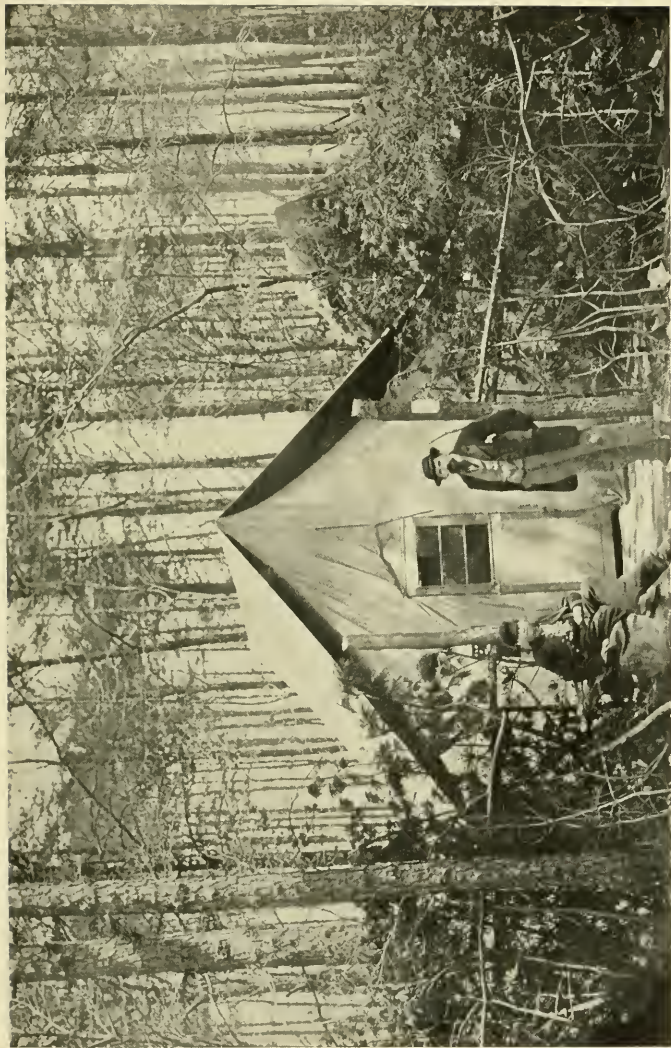
While eating this frugal repast, Dr. Dougherty, the medical director of our corps, passed by, and told me the Twentieth was under orders to march, and that the only way I could join it would be in an ambulance, which would pass in half an hour on its way to the third division of our

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

corps, and quartered but a short distance from our own division. I was glad enough of this opportunity, and rode in the ambulance till it reached its own camp; passed the rest of the night lying in it, and at daybreak started on foot for the regiment, which, by the way, was not easy to do with my stiff leg. But, after all, this was the quickest way to limber it.

I arrived at noon, and the warm, hearty greeting given me from old friends and comrades did much to raise my drooping spirits.

If one is obliged to go soldiering, this camp life is delightful. The weather is charming, our situation beautiful, and I feel happier here than anywhere else away from home. . . . Home! Oh, how that word still haunts me! Yet I am calmer now and take the situation more reasonably; but an awful sinking at the heart still sweeps over me, and I can easily understand how soldiers die of homesickness.



THE POST OFFICE





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I have a very disagreeable duty to perform this morning, — that of tattooing a man's breast for desertion. He is to have his head shaved and be drummed out of camp to-morrow. It would be better to shoot the man than to permanently disgrace him, but he does not seem to mind it much, and probably is so demoralized that he is past feeling shame.

October 1st, 1863.

We had a drunken row in camp last night, owing to some villain's having sold whiskey to the men, and it was one o'clock before the noisy ones were secured and all became quiet. These conscripts, or rather substitutes, behave disgracefully, deserting at every possible chance, even to the enemy. Notwithstanding that two who belonged to our regiment were shot, thirty-four deserted immediately after. One fellow, having failed to escape in the direction of his home, attempted to go over to the

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

enemy, but was prevented. He then shot his finger off, with the hope of being sent to the hospital, where the opportunities for desertion are greater, but the result is that he will serve with one finger less.

Last night the moon was brilliant, camp-fires blazed in every direction, and with our blankets spread around a huge mass of burning embers and our pipes lighted, we lay listening to music from the bands; I, for one, dreaming of matters and things far enough away from where I was.

This morning I have been trying my leg a little on horseback, and luckily managed very well.

CAMP AT RAPIDAN CREEK, October, 1863.

I have spread my blanket under a tree so that I might write in the shade. The heat is intense during the day, but the nights are freezingly cold, and in the early morning my nose is as blue as steel, and each hair stands perpendicularly. The sit-

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uation of the camp is so low that a thick heavy mist overhangs it all night. My overcoat and one blanket are lost; no one can account for them, though they were left on my horse, strapped to the saddle. The only covering I have at night is a single blanket, with a rubber one under me, which keeps me dry but is as cold as stone.

Music is a tremendous help. Our own band is not here, but the two other brigades have theirs, and as the camps adjoin we enjoy the benefit of both. One band generally plays two hours after breakfast, and the other from sunset until half-past nine.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

### CHAPTER VI

#### THE MURDER OF CAPTAIN McKAY

ON the 5th of October, 1863, a horrible murder occurred in the camp of the Twentieth Massachusetts, and as the facts concerning it extended through many weeks, it seems well to collect and give them as a whole.

Our corps was encamped in a thick wood within a few miles of Culpeper, and its presence could be detected only by the clouds of smoke from camp-fires curling above the trees. Close to our rear was a regiment notorious for its drunken brawls and lawlessness. It was composed principally of conscripts, substitutes, and New York rioters, among them many jail-birds, and force and arms were often necessary

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to quell the incessant rows and disturbances among these rough characters.

On the evening of October 5th, taps had sounded in the Twentieth Massachusetts, lights were out, every man was in his tent, and the silence of the night was broken only by the wind which swept fitfully through the pines. Only the officer of the day and I were in camp, the others being on a visit to another regiment, and the soft little glimmer of light which shone forth in the prevailing darkness came from the tent outside of which Captain McKay and I were seated. . . . The Captain had enlisted as a private when the regiment was first organized, and by his intelligence, bravery, and good fellowship had reached his present rank. Company F, which he commanded, was made up of the worst elements in the regiment, which was otherwise unusual for military deportment and manly bearing.

We sat talking of the incessant delays

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in hostilities, when a shout interrupted us, followed by yells and drunken laughter.

“The fellows in our rear,” I said, after a moment’s pause; but the Captain’s face was anxious.

“No,” he answered, “those are my men; they are drunk and quarrelsome; something tells me there is trouble brewing to-night; ever since I punished the ringleaders in those rows they have been sullen and out of temper. In the drill this afternoon I did not like their mood,” and asking me to stand ready in case of need, he left and sauntered towards the company’s tent.

I heard the Captain order his men to their quarters, but in so calm a voice that it seemed to me he dealt too gently with the brutes; and on the instant there was a shot and then a moan. I reached the spot in time to see the Captain leap into the air and fall, and to hear him cry, “Doctor, I am murdered!”

By the flickering light of the same little

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candle by which we had just sat, we bore him into the tent; but he was dead when we reached it. Dead! A little enough word, but with such weight of meaning!

Instantly the sergeant, then aroused, ordered the men of the Captain's company into line; the officers were sent for, and, on their quick return, the roll was called, and every gun examined. Every man was present, and each had his gun, but many of them were so drunk they could barely stand. Those who were sufficiently sober knew that they stood not only in the presence of a crime, but of their murdered captain, whose body was now stretched upon the ground before them. Neither moon nor stars shone upon them; no other light than the uncertain glimmer of a camp-fire and tent candle, which only added to the ghastly pallor of the men.

During the inspection I stood by the body, facing the lines, intently watching every movement, alert to every sound.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

Soon there was a murmur of astonishment, and we saw in the ranks before us an Italian boy, — a raw recruit, half-witted, or at least so dull that his officers had been able to do but little with him. There he stood with a smoking musket. His hands hung limply by his side, his eyes without light or expression in them were fastened upon his weapon. The spent cap was on the nipple; the smoke still issued from the muzzle and the lock was blackened by the discharge.

We looked from the gun to the boy; he the murderer, — he, with neither years nor wit?

“Tell your story,” said the Major, looking steadfastly into the boy’s eyes, to hold, if possible, the fellow’s scattered wits.

This roused him, and throwing himself upon his knees, with tears streaming over his cheeks and a voice thin and stifled, he gave, by a few words here and there, by expression and gesture, a clear enough ac-



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count of all he knew, making us understand that he had neither tent nor blanket; had been cold and sleepy, and so, leaning his musket against a tree near the fire, his cartridge and cap-box beside it, dropped to sleep at its foot. The shot roused him; he saw some one carried off, and when he heard the sergeant call the roll he made a grab for his musket, but not finding it, supposed it had fallen, and while groping for it in the darkness he tripped over it as it lay concealed in the bushes; then he caught it up, suspecting nothing, and rushed to his place in the ranks.

There was silence now; all the officers had judged the lad, and in our own minds felt him guiltless of the crime, but in the absence of any other clew he must be dealt with.

He was taken to the body, and before all those assembled was made to kneel, kiss the Bible, and with his left hand over the dead man's heart, the other raised, to swear

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before God that he was innocent of the deed. This he did with the weariness of a bewildered child, and, in spite of circumstantial evidence, the conviction of his innocence was so universal that the lad was allowed to wander to the warmth of the still smouldering fire, where exhaustion and sleep soon wrapped him in oblivion.

Attention was again riveted upon the ranks. Was the murderer facing us from among those men in line, or was he creeping stealthily away through the darkness?

The officers gathered about the body of the murdered captain, and after a brief consultation it was decided to dismiss the men and wait until the morning for further action. The body was removed to a large tent, where the sergeant and I watched over it for the remainder of the night. The wind moaned and whistled, things creaked and flapped in the blasts, and in this weary vigil even the monotonous tramp, tramp of a sentinel outside the tent took its place in

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the tragedy. The night wore on, and in the bleak and cheerless dawn all the officers of the regiment gathered about the dead Captain to hold a council. After long deliberation it was decided that the men of Company F should march into the tent one by one, kneel, kiss the Bible, and, with one hand on the heart of the murdered man, each should swear before God that he was innocent of all implication in the crime.

In the solemn silence of this Court of Officers, under the concentrated attention of all present, when not the flicker of an eyelid could escape observation, each man faced the ordeal without flinching, with no sign of guilt; and many bore themselves with the dignity of honest freedom, though in the presence of conditions before which even an innocent heart might quail. The experiment was a failure, and hours passed in which all available means to discover the assassin were fruitlessly tried. Even the lawless men of the Captain's company were

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shocked into good behavior, and in their bearing expressed respect and love for their dead commander. Indeed, the Captain's death has cast a deep gloom over the entire regiment. The old Twentieth, which has so long borne the name of "Gallant," now bears the burden of this stigma. We constantly questioned ourselves and others as to all possibilities in respect to the murderer; we wondered if he were lurking in the riotous regiment which was quartered in our rear; but what cause had we for such suspicions? Possibly one of the Captain's men owed him a grudge for punishment received, and had bartered the revengeful act with one of those neighboring ruffians. A reward might settle the question, and for this purpose a sum of money was immediately collected and offered to any one who should give information in regard to the murder, with the added promise of a furlough home. As for me, — I wish I could give the rest of

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my pay while in the service to have the murderer caught and shot. I cannot recover from the shock.

Just at this moment orders to march arrived, which instantaneously changed the scene. Tension and strain yielded to bustle and activity.

The sergeant and I carefully watched the placing of the Captain's body in an ambulance bound for Alexandria, where the remains would be embalmed before the journey home.

My horse had been disabled by a shoulder wound, which I now examined with some anxiety, lest the animal might become useless during the move of the army; but he seemed in a satisfactory condition, and with his good services I felt sure of holding my place in the ranks in spite of my lame leg.

As we were about to start we saw a stranger in officer's uniform approaching us, who asked where he could find the

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

officer in command of the regiment. The Major, who happened to be near, heard the question, and said, "What is your business with me?"

"I hail from the same place as the Captain who was killed last night," answered the man. "I've served my time and am on my way home, and, if you like, will take charge of the body and see that it arrives safely."

The Major became interested. It seemed a most fortunate arrangement, especially in a time of so much hurry and confusion, and after a brief conference with the other officers of the regiment, it was decided that the opportunity was too good a one to lose, and that they had better accept an offer of such disinterested services. A sufficient sum of money was raised to cover all expenses, as well as to recompense the man for his trouble, and the ambulance, with its solitary burden, was delivered into his hands to begin the long

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and tedious journey towards the New England town.

The army was quickly on the move, and for a time all went well with me, but before many hours had passed my horse became lame, soon proving utterly unable to carry me. In this plight I dismounted, not a little dismayed, yet so determined to persevere that I held to the saddle, and by aid of the horse walked painfully on. In spite of every effort to keep my place, I slowly but surely receded to the rear, and there met the ambulance which bore the body of the dead captain; changing my hold from the horse to the tailboard of this ambulance, I pulled myself along.

The onward push of men and artillery, the deafening medley of noises, the dense clouds of blinding, suffocating dust, and my own suffering for a time completely absorbed me, but my thoughts finally centred upon the ambulance with its burden. Walking by the side of the vehicle was the

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Captain's friend, who, seeing that he was recognized, joined me. He told me that he had served his time, was sick and tired of the life, and glad enough to go home. The man's voice was sullen, and his head hung forward and down.

A noise in the ambulance turned my attention to a water-cask, which I saw had broken loose, and was rolling over the body.

"Fasten that cask, will you," I said to the man at my side, "or it will injure the Captain's body."

"D—— the Captain!" came like a flash from the lips of the man; but with an instantaneous glance at me he mumbled: "Oh, what did you say, Doc? Oh, the water-cask! Yes, I'll fix it"; and he jumped inside of the wagon and fastened the keg in its place.

This oath, flung out in hate and scorn from the lifelong friend and neighbor of the Captain, was startling to say the



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least. I turned and looked the man well over. The more I looked, the more I shrank from something despicable in his gait and aspect; a sneak, and a cowardly bully, I'll be bound, I thought. I would not trust him out of sight, and, although the man continued his desultory talk, my heedless answers finally silenced him.

As soon as possible the circumstance was reported to the officer in charge, but although it was certainly considered suspicious, there did not seem sufficient evidence to act upon, and before long I watched from a growing distance the ambulance, with its single guard shambling by the side, wending its separate way. I wish to God, I thought, that the man was back and well secured.

Weeks passed without trace of the murderer, although the search was constant and persistent. Warm letters of sympathy were sent from the camp to the girl at the North who was waiting now for the dead body

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of her lover, — letters which assured her of the safe transportation of the remains, guarded as they were by a lifelong friend of the Captain's, — by name, who was on his way home and had offered his services.

More weeks passed, when one day, while the officers were together at mess, an orderly handed a letter to the Major in command of the regiment.

“By Jove!” said the latter, glancing at the postmark, “this letter is from the Captain's poor girl,” and tearing it open, he read the contents aloud. They stated that neither the body of Captain McKay nor the man who left the camp with it in charge had arrived; nor would they ever do so, for she was absolutely certain that that man was the assassin. Some time ago she had refused his offer of marriage and, when he heard of her engagement to the Captain, he swore he would kill him, if it were necessary to enlist for the purpose.

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Subsequently he had enlisted in a New York regiment, from which she also knew he was dishonorably discharged at the date of the murder.

Consternation settled upon every face at the conclusion of the reading. So! It seemed that the murderer had calmly and freely walked off with the body of his victim! What fools he had made of us all! And the grotesqueness of the trick the creature had played upon us grew, and with it grew the determination to track that man on whatever road he might be, and to serve him his due.

Wider interest in the matter was raised; more funds subscribed and detectives sent in all directions. The contents of the letter soon spread among the men of the regiment, and those concerned in the drunken brawl on the night of the murder finally confessed that the man who travelled from camp with the dead captain was the same who gave them whiskey the night he was

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

shot; that this man did his best to incite them to the murder, and, when he failed in this, grabbed the boy's gun, crouched in the bushes, and fired the fatal shot himself.

In course of time news arrived of the capture of the murderer in a Western regiment, and that he was then on his way back to our quarters under strict guard. The satisfaction of officers and men was immense, and not one would have tossed a penny to save the wretch's life. We had all the necessary proof, and every witness of the deed was present.

When the man arrived, a court-martial was immediately convened. He was tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged; but before the execution could take place the necessary papers must be supervised in Washington, and during this delay the prisoner was strictly guarded night and day.

Time crept slowly on, until eventually an official document postmarked "Wash-

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ington " arrived, was handed to the officer in command, who, in the presence of his staff, opened it with the composure of assured success; for had they not possession of the man, and sufficient proof to hang twenty like him?

" Read! read!" we cried, but the Major, staring at the page, seemed barely able to see the words, then, with a round oath, he flung the paper upon the table.

" That man," he said, " the murderer of our captain, is free, — scot free — as free as a North American Indian! A legal flaw has been discovered in the paper sent to Washington which renders it absolutely invalid. There is no redress, and nothing can be done."

Amazement and consternation overpowered us. Was there no loophole of escape by which we could hold the prisoner and in time enforce the punishment?

No! the order to liberate the prisoner must be immediate. This was given, and

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erealong we saw the murderer leave the camp, heard him jeer his would-be executioners, and, with his thumb upon his nose, we saw him wave his fingers in derision and vanish into mystery.

# OF THE CIVIL WAR

## CHAPTER VII

### CAMP NEAR CULPEPER

October 9th, 1863.

WE expect to move from here any hour. Stewart's cavalry annoys us greatly, and I fear some fine day, before we know it, a few hundred of us will be gobbled up. Once we heard horses' hoofs thundering through the woods, the yells of their riders, and the cry from our men, "The cavalry, the cavalry!" followed by a sharp order to form a hollow square. . . . Just then there seemed no use for me, and afterward I remembered a moment's wish to make a hollow square of myself, then being amused at the thought that having but one front, the rest of me would be ridden

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down. . . . But it was all a false alarm, for though the enemy was close upon us, something turned them just in time to miss our whereabouts.

This army is so demoralized by substitutes and conscripts that it seems to me it is in a critical condition. We have drunken rows and disturbances in the camps about us almost every night, nor are we exempt ourselves, although since that terrible murder the majority of the men have behaved splendidly and are perfectly obedient. Every day we have assurances of their love and attachment to their dead captain.

It is now eleven o'clock A. M., and at two P. M. a man in the division is to be shot. The execution is to take place by the side of our camp. All the regiments in the division are to be present, and I expect to be detailed as one of the surgeons to examine the body after it falls. I feel too sad to write. I can bear to



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see hundreds shot in battle, but everything in me recoils from seeing a man shot in cold blood; and if these horrible scenes do not stop, my whole nature will change.

The Twentieth was under arms last night, ready, if necessary, to quell a drunken row in the —— New York. The night was so cold that I could not sleep a wink, but sat shivering beside the fire. My hand shakes so now with the cold, I can barely write; yet, rough as this life is, I never was better.

Yesterday the entire corps was ordered to pitch tents, and at four P. M. reached this place about a mile from Culpeper, on the line of the railroad, where we are to rest from duties which have been very arduous since last June. At the old camp we had hard picket duty; here we have none. There we had only hardtack and pork to eat; here we have many luxuries. This morning, for the first time since I

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

joined the regiment, we had for breakfast butter and potatoes.

While on the march we halted near an old ice-house, the roofless cellar only remaining, its bottom filled with old straw. In this cellar a ladder leaned against one side, and, as most of these abandoned ice-houses are homes for snakes, a fellow in the ranks offered to bet that no one would dare go down that ladder and trample the straw.

Quiet reigned for a moment while each man thought the matter over, when a little ignorant recruit, about nineteen years old, accepted the bet and gallantly started down the ladder. Just as his face reached the level of the beam which had supported the roof, he saw lying under it a moccasin snake, its head only a few inches from his face. His eyes became fixed, his teeth chattered, and his whole body was so rigid that the men got frightened and hauled him up by the coat collar. It was some

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time before he was restored to consciousness, and, although unmercifully chaffed by the men, his legs were so weak that for the rest of the march they had to support him.

# LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BATTLE OF BRISTOE STATION

BRANDY STATION, October 12th, 1863.

WE are on the march, and while the men are resting I will scratch a line or two. We struck tents on Saturday, marched some three miles to the west of the town of Culpeper, and were formed in line of battle in the woods, where we remained through a terrible storm without shelter or fires, in momentary expectation of an attack.

At three o'clock in the morning we were ordered to move on. The night was of the blackest, the streams were swollen by the rains, and in the dense growth of trees and underbrush the column broke, men became bewildered and demoralized, lost their way, stumbled over rocks and roots, plunged into

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ditches and then scrambled out as best they could, soaked with mud and water. Bonfires were lighted to extricate us from our dilemma, but instead set the woods on fire. Sparks flew in all directions, and soon tongues of fire were everywhere. The frightful heat, the dense smoke, and the mad rush of men to free themselves at any cost, made "Hell." No other word can describe the scene. By daybreak, however, we worked our way through and joined the main column. So much lost time had to be made up that we could wait neither for rest nor breakfast, and the cold was bitter.

At nine o'clock in the morning we halted for ten minutes to eat a little hardtack, and then pushed on until four o'clock P.M., when we reached this place, and again halted for rest and food, after a march of thirteen hours. Knapsacks were opened, and pork, hard bread, and coffee dealt out in abundance.

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I ate until I was satisfied, then filled my pipe and lay down to supreme enjoyment; and I believe no one, unless under like circumstances, could have the slightest idea of the extent of such enjoyment, or of the calm which stole over me after such a night. I almost instantly fell asleep, pipe in mouth, and waked only at midnight, — and then from cold, — built a fire, warmed myself, and slept again. Nevertheless, before the sun is up I have washed and breakfasted. In a few minutes we shall probably have orders to move.

The enemy is supposed to be trying to cut us off from Washington, and, as nearly as I can understand the matter, the Confederates and the Yankees are seeing who can march the faster. If we are first there we shall probably avoid a battle, but if they are first on the ground, we must fight.

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AUBURN, ON THE BANKS OF THE BULL

RUN RIVER, October 22nd, 1863.

Much has transpired since I last wrote.

General Lee's intention was to cut our army in two and whip each part separately. We marched and countermarched, prepared for battle by day and made forced marches by night. Our corps being the rear-guard, of course we had the hardest work, and for a week slept only one night. While on the march I suffered so much with my leg that it was impossible to keep up with the regiment, although extremely dangerous to fall behind, as guerillas were everywhere; but, notwithstanding that we are faced with the painful results of danger under every form, the more we recognize its presence the less we fear it, and the greater is our reckless daring.

There was no proper food for men or horses; what hardtack we had was so full of maggots that it had to be baked, which

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hardened it still more. No pork, and no water, except what we got from the puddles by the roadside. Men became so exhausted that they fell asleep while marching, and I slept while sitting in my saddle. The nights were bitterly cold; the roads almost impassable from the furious rains. The enemy threatened us on all sides, especially with their cavalry, but we did not run foul of them until the 14th.

Unknown to us, they had cut in and occupied the roads through which we were to march. When we reached a defile among the hills and were about to cross a broad stream, a sharp fire of musketry and artillery opened upon our brigade from General Hill's corps. For a moment it staggered us, for we did not even know where the attack came from, so great was the confusion. The corps immediately halted, formed into line of battle, and waited for the enemy's assault, which presently came with great force. The men



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stood firm as rocks and poured volley after volley into their ranks, but had a hard time of it, and General Warren's chief of staff, Colonel Morgan, saved the day by his great presence of mind.

Colonel Morgan ordered our brigade forward as skirmishers to drive the Confederates from the woods and take their batteries, but our advance was much impeded by the stream which had first to be crossed directly under the enemy's fire. This stream was very deep and its banks steep and slippery. Men fell headlong into the water, horses rolled down the bank backwards, carrying their riders with them, and for a time utter chaos and confusion reigned. The new recruits crouched, and I even heard some of them scream with fear, while the older troops and officers drove them on at the point of sword and bayonet.

A line was finally formed on the opposite bank, a charge made, and the enemy

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

driven back. The fight lasted about six hours. It was the enemy's cavalry only which took part in the engagement, or we should not have had such an easy victory. . . . We lay there, surrounded by the graves of the dead, and the stench from the battlefield was beyond expression.

When we moved it was in a thick fog. Marching by the railroad track, we reached an open space, intersected here and there by low ridges, near Bristoe Station. I was riding with General Webb at the head of the column when, through the lifting mist, we dimly saw another column marching parallel with ours, and the prevailing color in the ranks being blue, we supposed it to be one of our own corps.<sup>1</sup> Both columns stopped and stared in amazement at each other, but in a moment what had seemed a spectral host turned about face and

<sup>1</sup> At this period of the war blue Federal uniforms were frequently taken from the battlefields and worn by Confederate soldiers.

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fired a tremendous volley into us. This was sufficient proof that we faced an enemy.

Our men were immediately filed in line behind an embankment, but still by the side of the railroad. The Confederates formed a straight and strong line of battle and advanced upon us. We were separated from the main army, while the enemy was in force and in an advantageous position. Our men were largely conscripts, who had never seen an attacking line before. They were ordered not to fire until the enemy was close upon them. How would they behave?

On came the Confederates with such steady force and such perfect coolness that the raw recruits of the — New York regiment could not stand the strain, and rushed headlong, pell-mell, for the rear. Colonel Mallon of that regiment, but who at the time commanded the brigade, was fortunately behind them, and, drawn

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

sword in hand, succeeded in stopping the stampede.

The enemy still advanced without wavering. Suddenly the order "Fire!" rang along our lines. Hundreds of the Confederates dropped; others, bewildered, rushed back, some forward, while our fellows, with a wild cheer, fired volley after volley into them. Not a man seemed to be left standing, and they came into our lines as prisoners by fifties, wounded and bleeding.

Another line, still stronger, still steadier, was formed by the enemy, but our batteries were now run out, and shell, solid shot, and canister were poured upon them with marked effect. They closed and closed, advancing in a solid mass.

Our guns again were quiet, awaiting a nearer approach.

Colonel Mallon was at that time with me in the rear, for, as the brigade had made a breastwork of the railroad embank-

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

ment, he could not be in front; and we were lying side by side, flat on the ground, so as to be out of range of the enemy's guns, when the colonel, who was very fond of Major Abbott, said he must take a look round and see if he were safe. I begged him not to, saying that he would surely be shot, but he answered, "No, I cannot stand the suspense, and it will take but a moment"; whereupon he rose, and was instantly shot through the abdomen.

I dragged him to a little muddy stream, — the only place of safety, — where the poor fellow lay with the water almost running down his throat. He lived until the fight was almost over, and finally expired in my arms. He was just married.

The fight continued until dark, the enemy throwing out line after line up to that time. I was busy enough after the battle was over, and came within an ace of being taken prisoner, but Johnny Reb did not catch me that time.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

The prisoners told us that, notwithstanding this success of ours, we could not escape, as General Ewell had passed up on our left and was surrounding us; but in spite of this on we marched, all through that night, without a halt, worn out as we were. I cannot express the torture I endured in trying to keep my eyes open. I believe I rode for miles in a sound sleep.

At dawn we joined the main army in the fortifications here at Auburn, bordering the Bull Run River. The day's work had been a most signal victory, and our brigade had captured five guns and two colors. A company of sharpshooters attached to the regiment did splendid work. They killed the enemy's gunners and then bodily mounted the guns, from which points of vantage they picked off any one who approached them. A corporal commanding them reported to General Warren the capture of the guns, and asked assistance in taking them off. The gen-

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

eral detailed a certain number of men from each regiment for that duty, and thereby claimed that the corps took the guns instead of giving credit where it was due, — to the sharpshooters. General Webb, however, who commanded our division, and who, by the way, behaved most gallantly, issued a special order complimenting the sharpshooters for their services.

At the beginning of the fight I owned two horses; one of which, old Bessie, being lame, I used for a pack horse, the other I rode. On the former were my blankets, overcoat, tobacco, wash-basin; in fact, everything except my valise, which, fortunately, was in the wagon-train. When the fight began I ordered my servant, who had charge of Bessie, to take her to a place of safety, but before going far a ball struck her in the leg. She broke away from the man and ran to the front, where she was shot again, this time in the neck.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

Our cook, Fraser, was at the rear during the fight, and seeing a loose horse running wildly about, tried to catch her, but only succeeded in grabbing a haversack which was swinging from the saddle. He did not recognize the animal, but on opening the haversack saw a little book with my name on the title-page, and as soon as possible brought it to me. When I took the little book from Fraser's hands, saw it was safe, and found the written words still within its pages, I — well, I wished for an instant I was alone. That little book has weathered so much! When all else I had was soaked with rain the little volume was always dry. To-day I took it from my breastpocket before the fight and for safer keeping put it in the haversack, fearing in the great heat to have it so near my person, and also that with my case of instruments both together would weigh me down.

Later I went to the rear, and, dismount-



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

ing, gave my horse to one of General Webb's orderlies to hold while I attended to the wounded. When my duties were over I looked for my horse, but the man told me that a piece of shell must have struck her, for she reared and plunged so he was forced to let her go. On the march that night I was without either horse, coat or blanket, and trudged along as best I could, until finally the adjutant gave me his mount. This morning I have old Bessie again. When passing General Webb's headquarters I saw her standing, tied to a tree, and was told that she had been caught by an orderly. She is doing well, and will recover from her wounds. The other horse I have not yet heard from.

We are all fagged and worn out, half starved, and poorly clad. Possibly we may remain quiet long enough to have some good hardtack, pork, and coffee, and, above all, fresh water. I can eat almost anything, but clean water is a necessity. We break-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

fasted yesterday on nothing but raw cabbage, yet, although I have been sleeping in the mud in clothes sopping wet, I am perfectly well.

Have you seen in the papers that General Meade complimented our corps? He said that it saved the whole army at the battle of Bristoe Station.

# OF THE CIVIL WAR

## CHAPTER IX

### MARCHING AND COUNTER-MARCHING

CAMP NEAR WARRENTON,

October 25th, 1863.

WE do not stay long in one place, but go marching on. We have stopped here only temporarily; yesterday it rained so hard, and our supplies are so far gone, that we cannot move again for at least twenty-four hours, for the men have had literally almost nothing to eat. The supper last night for our own mess consisted of maggoty hard bread and brown sugar (*alias* sand).

We are encamped on the slope of a hill, just under the Blue Ridge, surrounded by thick forests. The other regiments are encamped in the woods facing us, and the music of the bands, which play in every

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

direction, just fills my soul. With what? Why, with the inexpressible.

To-day I inspected the rations of the men, and have already condemned about a thousand pounds of hardtack.

October 28th, 1863.

We have had marching orders for forty-eight hours now, and been told we are going to the front to fight, but have not moved yet. Yesterday our orders were to pack up, and we have been packing up ever since, making ourselves very miserable and uncomfortable.

Our food is disgusting, — poor hard bread and brown sugar. The teams of supplies are not allowed to come up to us, which seems unnecessary and unwarrantable. Worst of all, we are even without tobacco. This morning I was sitting in the quartermaster's big wall tent watching the loading of a team with boxes of hardtack, when under one of the boxes before me, which a man was about tossing to his

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

shoulder, I saw a copperhead snake, which instantly coiled and struck the fellow's leg just above the boot, and the man pitched headlong, as if from the blow of a hammer. With my penknife I immediately cut around the spot where the fang of the reptile had penetrated, which was plainly visible, then cauterized the wound thoroughly. Neither of these processes caused suffering, as the blow seemed to have paralyzed the sensitive nerves. The man passed into a dead faint, and was carried on a stretcher to the hospital tent. I hope that but little poison entered his system, as the tooth first passed through his trousers, then through thick woollen stockings, — but his temperature is now very high.<sup>1</sup>

RAPPAHANNOCK STATION,

November 9th, 1863.

We have been marching during the last two days, so that I have been unable to

<sup>1</sup> The man finally recovered but came very near losing his life.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

write. Now, while waiting for further orders, I will scratch a few lines to say that we have crossed the Rappahannock notwithstanding that the enemy was so strongly entrenched. General Sedgwick's corps was the only one which had any fighting to do, and it did not amount to much.

We crossed at Kelly's Ford without opposition, as we captured the whole Confederate force guarding it. Not a gun has yet been fired by our division. The rumor is that General Butler is marching up the peninsula to Richmond, and that we are keeping General Lee and his force here to prevent his attacking. I doubt very much if we have much fighting, — doubt if General Meade means anything more than to prevent General Lee from sending away any more troops. Shall always keep sealed letters in my pocket to send when opportunity offers, for we are now cut off from communications.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

MOUNTAIN RUN,

November 11th, 1863.

On the 9th we had quite a little snow-storm, and yesterday, when on the march, the snow-covered "Blue Hills" towered above us, their icy cliffs illuminated by the sun's rays into every enchanting color. We have ice now every night, and last night it froze nearly two inches thick.

I have been working hard to-day, pitching my tent upon a log foundation. It will be warmer, and will allow me to sit up. To-morrow I shall build an underground fireplace, for the wind blows so hard here in the winter that it is impossible to keep warm by an outside fire, for while your front is warming your back is freezing, and if the fire is very near the tent, the smoke blows in and smothers you. My eyes are now almost put out by the smoke; my hands are covered with pitch

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

from handling pine logs; my feet are soaking wet; and I am cross.

We are encamped on soil so saturated with water that I sent a protest to General Warren to-day asking him if we could not move to a drier spot, but he answered that we should have to go several miles to find such, and that, of course, was impossible. We are evidently to remain here for the winter.

I have had the whole regiment out to-day, cutting down trees to let the sun in, and digging trenches to drain the water off, but as it is only necessary to dig a few inches to come upon more water, the task is rather a hopeless one. This winter I mean to build a gymnasium for the men to exercise in when it is too cold and stormy for drilling. The officers are interested in the plan, and already we fence, box, and exercise every day, and feel much better for it.



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

November 13th, 1863.

I have just returned from a ride of over twenty miles on horseback at break-neck speed through woods and over rough, rocky country. I had to go to General Meade's headquarters on business, so started at reveille this morning, and it is now ten o'clock P. M. I enjoyed it immensely; was treated very hospitably, and had quite a long conversation with General Meade.

On the way back I fell in with an officer on General Warren's staff, and while riding through the woods we suddenly came upon two men dressed in Confederate clothes. We stopped and inquired of them where they belonged. They gave evasive answers, and while we were talking one of them, having scanned us and seen no arms, attempted to escape. Fortunately, I had my revolver, and on presenting it cocked at his head, he halted and gave

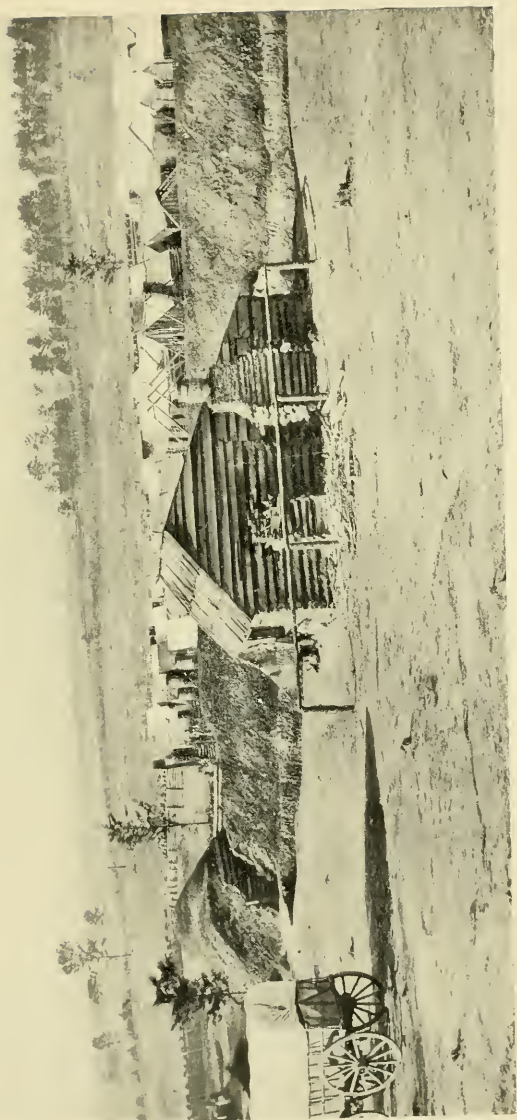
## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

himself up. We took them both to headquarters.

I am interested in trying to improve the present plan for ventilating regimental hospitals in winter. I think, instead of having stoves, I will build fireplaces of sticks and clay, modelled after some I saw in a Confederate camp.

November 15th, 1863.

I wrote you, I think, of the wet, boggy ground we are encamped on. Last night it rained in torrents, and in five minutes the bottom of my tent held one or two inches of water. My couch is made of leaves packed between two logs, and by nine o'clock the water became so deep that it ran over the logs into the bed, and on waking I found myself perfectly drenched and everything I owned in the same condition. My valise had been left open, and its contents were almost ruined; letters, pictures, clothing,—all were soaked. How-



WINTER QUARTERS OF THE TWENTIETH MASSACHUSETTS



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

ever, there was one little picture and one little book in a closed box by themselves, and their safety made the ruin of the rest seem as nothing.

MOUNTAIN RUN,

November 20th, 1863.

We expect to march to-morrow, where, I know not; but what I do know is that to-night rations are being issued to the men, and that we are looking for an order to ride up any moment with orders to march at daylight. . . . I don't much care for this packing at midnight and starting in the gray of dawn, — likely as not after neither sleep nor breakfast.

This morning several of us went to see a review of the Sixth corps by invitation of General Sedgwick, commanding. It was a magnificent display. The Sixth is a very large corps, and probably contains 18,000 men. Every officer was in full uniform, every man well brushed and pol-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

ished; the bands played well, and the whole thing was superb.

General Sedgwick held the review in honor of some British officers who are visiting the army, and after inspecting the troops, all the invited guests repaired to the general's headquarters, where a fine dinner was served. We enjoyed the occasion hugely.

MOUNTAIN RUN,

November 21st, 1863.

Here we are still, with rumors of movements in plenty, but with no start. This morning we had a general inspection of the men, camp, and hospital, by the inspector-general of the corps. On leaving, the general remarked that "the Twentieth was the finest regiment in the Potomac army for cleanliness, discipline, and fighting!" How is that for the old Twentieth?

We are perfectly deluged with rain, and my tent, raised on logs, has a deep pool of water around it.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

The colonel has just taken supper with me on my little rustic table. Our supper consisted of coffee in one cup, brown sugar, and hard bread. The colonel used his right hand in drinking and I my left, so that our lips touched different sides of the cup. Our repast was delicious. First we soaked the hard bread in coffee, then toasted it over the coals, and when it was hot and brown we spread it with melted brown sugar.

Next Thursday will be Thanksgiving Day. How I wish our men could have something extra to eat, poor fellows! They have had potatoes only about a dozen times since last June, and are becoming badly run down. We have received from one of our officers now at the North a quantity of raisins, flour, pickles, etc., for their Thanksgiving dinner, and we also have permission to send to Washington for more supplies. We officers do not need these extras, as our pay enables us to buy

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

pickles and such things to prevent scurvy, but the men have not the money for luxuries.

November 25th, 1863.

I did not expect to write again from this camp, but fate will have it so.

Night before last orders came to march at daylight. No fires could be lighted, and preparations were to be made in the strictest silence. A northeast storm was blowing, a drizzly rain falling, and everything was cold and cheerless. With the exception of one hour, when I took a hurried nap, I was up throughout the night preparing the sick and disabled for the move, and at five o'clock A. M., without coffee or anything to eat except wet hard bread, we started off. Rumor said we were bound for the Rapidan and Richmond.

It rained — oh, how it rained! We marched about half a mile through bog and mud, when we came upon a battery of the artillery stuck fast. To go on



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

seemed to all of us an impossibility, and while we halted, waiting to extricate the cannon, orders came to return to old quarters and again encamp. A cheer rose from every throat, and most fortunate it was, I think, that we did return, for the rain continued during the day and all of the following night. When we reached the old camp I bailed out my little enclosure as one would bail out a leaky boat.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

### CHAPTER X

#### THE OTHER SIDE OF GERMANNIA FORD

December 3rd, 1863.

WHEN I last wrote we were wishing ourselves home for Thanksgiving, but as that was impossible, we resolved to do the best we could here, and so determined to have a plum pudding, at least. Two days were spent building an oven in which to bake it, and when everything was ready the night before the important day, I think it would have been impossible for any one under other circumstances to realize our intense anticipation of the coming feast.

Alas! That same night at twelve o'clock we were ordered to march at daylight, and on the very morning of Thanksgiving Day flour and raisins were thrown away, and

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

we went trudging on with thousands of other poor devils. It is a strange provision of nature that when one is very hungry the longing for a promised morsel assumes such proportions that it seems for a time to take possession of the whole of one's being. I am quite certain that on this march each man in the regiment was so completely absorbed in his disappointment that for many miles it was to him the only source of discomfort.

We crossed the Rapidan River unmolested by the enemy, but soon after came upon their fortified position. The Second corps was sent to the left some twenty miles to flank this position, and the second division of that corps was chosen to storm the fortifications if the enemy were found to be concentrated. The Confederates were in strong force, and on heights surrounded by earthworks and rifle-pits which covered every approach. The situation seemed impregnable; the attempt to take it would de-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

mand such a sacrifice of life that the idea was abandoned, the whole plan given up, and at dark the retreat commenced and continued until each corps and division arrived at the old camping-ground from which it had started.

The next morning we were again on the march, when, after we had gone about a mile and were on an open plain, the troops were massed, and a telegram from General Grant was read, announcing his victory over Bragg. This was a great encouragement to all, and after some hearty cheers we resumed our march with renewed heart and spirit. The morning was clear and cold, the roads frozen, and the men in splendid condition.

About noon we reached the Germannia Ford on the Rapidan, where we waited some three or four hours while the cavalry reconnoitred and the engineers laid the pontoon-bridge. While crossing this pontoon-bridge the brigade surgeon gave us

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

all a good laugh. He rode his old red horse, whose ugly temper was known far and near. This horse was a lop-eared, long-shanked, cross-grained beast, always bent upon doing the unexpected. With ears laid back and head run out, ready to let fly fore and aft, he generally cleared his way by biting and kicking. In this case, as usual, he chose the most inconvenient spot for fooling, and in the middle of the bridge scattered men and horses to the right and left, seemingly determined to jump into the river. The doctor, somewhat ruffled by his antics, said, "Well, if you want a bath, take it!" and, suiting the action to the word, both horse and rider plunged into the stream. The men broke out into hearty cheers and roars of laughter as they watched the horse swim gallantly, bearing his dripping rider to the shore, where he quietly climbed the bank, a subdued and docile animal.

We camped that night on the heights on

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

the further side of the river, and at three o'clock the next morning the advance was sounded. On we went at a double-quick for nearly two hours by a road which ran through a thick forest. About one o'clock we heard firing in front, and the column was halted and ordered to load. Again we pushed on "double-quick," while the firing in front increased; then artillery began to boom, and finally we reached an open plain, where skirmishers were thrown out, and the main column was formed in line of battle with reserves in the rear. The men advanced, drawn up in fighting array, under a heavy fire from the Confederates, who were concealed in a thick wood in front. On reaching this wood, our skirmishers having driven the enemy's skirmishers back, we were halted behind a piece of rising ground to support a battery which was placed so as to sweep the thicket in case the enemy appeared in front. Skirmishing continued through the

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

remainder of the day, and in our regiment two men were wounded while lying under the hill. The weather was fearfully cold and raw, no fires could be lighted, and we lay on the ground shivering and freezing. At dark the Twentieth was sent out on picket duty to relieve the others who had been fighting all day. We passed a quiet night as to firing, both parties taking rest for the coming action.

The next morning the order to advance was given, and we formed in line of battle, with the Twentieth thrown forward as skirmishers. Away we went, sweeping through the woods in thick underbrush, over high rocks, through streams, but driving the Confederates back at every step. About ten o'clock the enemy's skirmishers were pushed to a hill, on the top of which was their main position, covered by earthworks and batteries, and for the rest of the day the skirmishers on both sides kept up a hot fire. Two of the sharpshooters in the Twen-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

tieth were wounded. Rain drenched us to the skin, and we had been without food all day.

At dark the regiment was ordered to the rear, still in line of battle. Again no fires were allowed, so of course we were not warmed with hot coffee, and, after nibbling a little hardtack, we rolled ourselves in our blankets and fell asleep, worn out with hunger, cold, and exhaustion.

The next morning at three o'clock General Warren took the Second corps, with one division from the Sixth, on a detour around the Confederate position, so as to reach its right flank. There he was to form a line of battle, and at eight o'clock open the attack by charging the enemy's works, after which the whole line, some seven or eight miles long, was to make a general assault.

We struck off on a side road leading to Orange Courthouse. The morning was cold and rainy, the roads in a frightful



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

condition, and a wearying time we had of it. I doubt if our ancestors at Valley Forge suffered more from cold than we did. I generally marched on foot so as to keep warm, and often found that I had been sound asleep while my legs were trudging along. Our horses became exhausted, having had neither grain nor hay since we began the march, and finally they gnawed each other's tails, or anything they could get hold of. Some of them ate the bark of the trees, and one horse in our pack devoured a whole grain bag with seeming relish. I fed my poor old Bessie on hardtack and salt pork.

About ten o'clock the sun came out, and in order not to be seen by the enemy, we had to break our way through the woods and underbrush, which tore everything to pieces, — clothes, blankets, and panniers. After marching some seven miles, we again struck the road, and the moment we did this the Confederates, masked by the woods

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

on the right, opened fire upon us. We were stunned by the unexpected attack, and perfect chaos reigned for a few minutes. Orderlies galloped up and down bearing orders, yet nobody knew what to do.

General Warren sent word to General Webb to deploy the best regiment he had in his division as skirmishers, and the general at once replied, "I send the Twentieth Massachusetts." The result was that without firing a shot our regiment forced the Confederates back into their fortifications. General Webb said afterwards, "The Twentieth has again covered itself with glory"; and he actually apologized for sending it out on such a duty, but said the necessity of driving the enemy back into their works was absolute, and he knew the Twentieth would do it.

A desultory fire from both sides continued until night set in. Great bravery was displayed by our officers. Colonel Macy, with his one hand, rode about under

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

fire as if the whole thing were a game of "puss-in-the-corner," and little Abbott rushed his men to the fight with immense spirit. The night passed quietly, but we felt that the great struggle must come on the following day.

At midnight our division was moved still farther to the left, and placed in position for a charge the next morning. The Confederate entrenchments could be seen by the light of the fires on the heights behind their fortifications, and the general effect by moonlight was that of a fortified citadel some two or three hundred feet above us, surrounded by bristling batteries. During the night five lines of battle were formed on our side. The first one was made up of poor, inexperienced regiments, and the second of old well-tried veterans, including the Nineteenth and Twentieth Massachusetts and the Seventh Michigan regiments. The hardest duty was given to the Twentieth, which was ordered to advance up

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

the hill about three-quarters of a mile without cover, the regiment of raw recruits, who were pretty sure to be panic-stricken, in front, and both of them exposed for all this distance to the fire of the Confederate batteries, which would be throwing grape, canister, and solid shot into the ranks, not to mention the deadly work of two tiers of rifle-pits filled three deep with infantry. The other regiments on the line were protected by thick woods, and consequently not exposed to any great amount of fire until they quite reached the enemy's works.

All the troops were in position about two o'clock, when the moon was brilliant, but the night one of the coldest I had known. We stood on boggy soil, the water freezing under our feet; and of course to lie down was impossible; besides, we were ignorant of what might occur at any moment.

At about seven o'clock communication

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

on the right was established with the main army; then came orders that a charge all along the line would be made at eight o'clock, and the signal for this charge would be the firing of a gun on the right of the line. Just before eight o'clock the commander of our division, General Webb, addressed the men as they stood in position, and some of his words I can never forget. He said: "I know that what you are called upon to do is desperate, and I also know that every man of you will fulfil his duty. I do not expect the first line to reach the works, but the second line must; and the third line is to enter and capture them. Boys, remember that I shall always be in your front."

The men well knew the truth of these words, and some of them even had the heart to applaud; but the general had strictly ordered, "No noise!" and indeed the prevailing feeling was too intense for demonstration. The men then came to me

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

in numbers, asking me to take charge of watches and personal effects, and to deliver messages to friends at home, of which I made careful memoranda, and begging me to promise to send everything to their families if they were killed.

Eight o'clock came. The men stood nerved for action; their faces stern, strained, every sense in suspense to catch the one sound of that signal-gun. But it did not come. Eight-fifteen passed — no signal; eight-thirty — nine — ten! The strain was awful! What was the matter? Why was not some explanation given? Then rumors reached us that the assault was to be abandoned, and by four o'clock that afternoon one man, exhausted by hunger and excitement, had the courage to lie down; at once others followed, till finally they lay like rows of bricks, each trying to screen himself behind his fellow from the pitiless cold. At dusk fires were lighted in the woods at the rear, that the

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

enemy might suppose we were bivouacking for the night, and men were detailed to feed these fires, while the rest were ordered to retreat in column along the turnpike, across the river, back whence we started.

On either side of the turnpike the woods had been fired to prevent an attack on our flank. We marched through fire and smoke, our eyes blinded, throats parched, stomachs empty, and limbs half frozen. All night we marched, and not until long after sunrise did we reach safety beyond the river. There we received orders to return to our old camping-ground, but some humane soul, probably General Webb, asked for one hour's halt for rest and food. One hour's rest was granted, but no food was given out.

At the end of that one hour I awoke, and beheld a sight never to be forgotten. Not a man, not a horse, was standing. So deep down and so profound was the sleep

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

that the stillness was that of death. Such was the exhaustion of all that every man who had a horse slept at his side with reins in hand.

Before the troops were fully roused the provision wagons arrived, and the men were so famished that any regular distribution of rations was impossible. Fighting their way, they seized and rifled the wagons, devouring what they secured like so many wild animals.

Again we marched, finally reaching our old camp, worn and footsore.



# OF THE CIVIL WAR

## CHAPTER XI

CAMP AT STEVENSBURG, VA.

STEVENSBURG,

December 6th, 1863.

**H**ERE we are, shuffled into a cold and cheerless camp, with neither protection from the wind nor wood to build fires with. Possibly these quarters may be permanent, though why we should be way down here in the front I do not understand.

We left our last camp yesterday morning, and are now four miles nearer the Rapidan than before. We were not allowed to pitch tents until dark, when it was too late to make ourselves warm for the night; and about midnight an icy wind sprang up, forcing us all to run about, that we might not freeze. I am now lying be-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

hind the trunk of an old tree for shelter, with my fingers so stiff that I can barely hold my pen.

I see by the Northern papers that this army is called "demoralized," "full of copperheads," and "fit only for observation work." This is because we did not give battle the other day, when we found the Confederates in their entrenched position. I wish such newspaper grumblers could be sent down here and put into the front ranks, when I rather think things would be seen in a different light.

December 7th, 1863.

Last night about midnight news came that a mail had arrived which was too large to be distributed until morning. Tired, even exhausted, as I was, the thought of a near letter which I knew was in that bag for me prevented the possibility of sleep. I soon found Macy was under the same restlessness as I, and we quickly agreed to

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

saddle our horses, ride to brigade headquarters, get the mail, and distribute it ourselves.

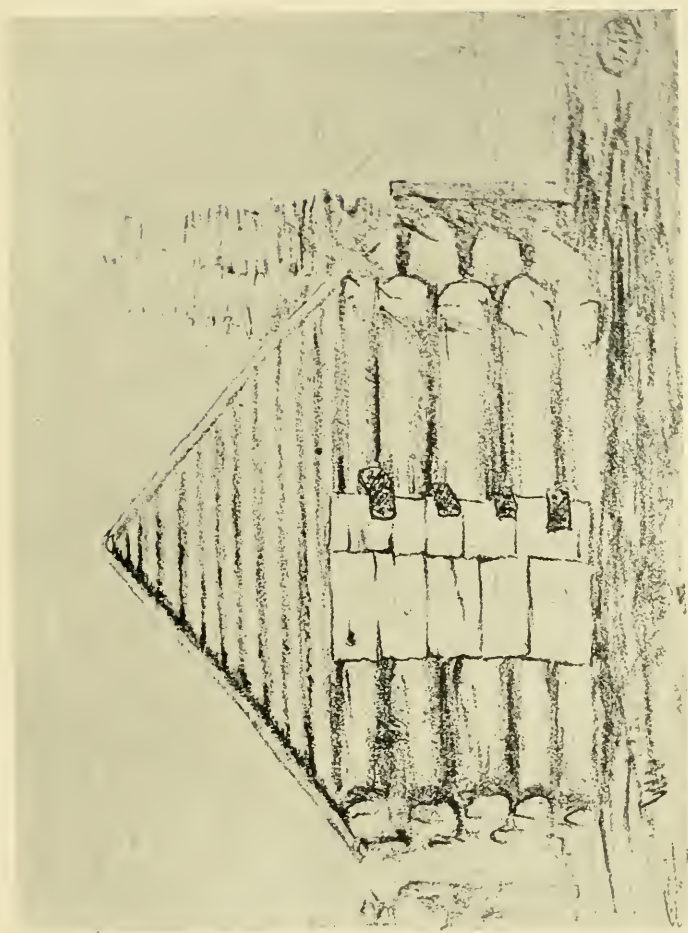
Off we went, found the mail, of many days' accumulation, threw it across the saddle, and rode home in high glee. I had no question as to the contents of that mail-bag; I knew my letter was there, beside many others for me. On our return we took the bag into Macy's tent, where, excepting for the very audible snores about us, there was silence.

I sat on the floor, placed a candle between my feet, and with a freshly lighted pipe went happily to work. A whole hour passed; the last letter was in my hand, and not a single one for me. Macy had four. I felt wicked, then distressed, and then really sick with disappointment, and so, finally, turned in. This morning I discovered that the whole mail had not arrived last night; that the rest was on its way; and before noon the best letter I

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

had ever received was in my hand. There were others, too.

We complained so much of our situation here that yesterday the camp was moved to a hillside facing south, where we can at least escape the fearful northers which blow here so tempestuously through the winter. For the last six weeks I have not known the feeling of warmth, especially at night. The ground upon which I sleep is so cold that it seems as if two feather beds, at least, would be necessary between me and the earth to make me really comfortable. But as things are, I have a bag made of one double army blanket, into which I let myself down, placing an India rubber blanket under me. Although the latter is the coldest thing in the world, it keeps the moisture out, and, in spite of everything, I am in splendid condition.



SKETCH OF THE HUT OF AN OFFICER OF THE TWENTIETH MASSACHUSETTS



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

December 10th, 1863.

We hear that the Government offers thirty days' furlough to old regiments when two-thirds of their men re-enlist. The bounties are so large and the offer so liberal that the chances are good for keeping the regiments up to a proper standard. Officers can re-enlist or not, as they choose. In their case no difference is made, but if two-thirds of the men re-enlist the whole regiment goes home, officers and all, to reorganize.

December 14th, 1863.

The need of wood in this place is so great that to remain much longer seems impossible, and yet we are building log tents as if for winter quarters. It is a miserable situation in many ways, and the food we have, if for a permanency, is not suitable. I breakfasted this morning on hardtack and coffee; then at noon we

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

dined on boiled beef, without the slightest seasoning of either salt or pepper. Even the water we bathe in, and wash our teeth with, must be left standing for half an hour before using, that the dirt in it may settle; and this same water is all we have for our coffee. Every day the wind blows a gale, and to-day it seems as if the tents would be blown to rags. This morning I put my fire out, for fear my tent would be blown over and set on fire.

Harry Abbott has gone home for a furlough; also Uncle Nathan, as we call Surgeon Hayward, and I confess the camp is desolate without them. However, Macy is here, and I am fond of him.

December 20th, 1863.

It is Sunday, and our camp wears an appearance, I suppose it might be said, appropriate to the day. Everywhere there is silence and monotony. The white canvas tents look cold and cheerless in the



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

winter atmosphere, and the only human being outside, beside myself, is the sentinel, pacing up and down, up and down. There is one little suggestion of comfort and coziness, and that is the blue smoke curling up from the mud chimneys of the huts built all about, which look, but for this, like prairie dog mounds. However, in a few moments everything will change, for the drums will beat, and the men march to their Sunday inspection, heavily laden with knapsacks and muskets.

I dread the long, weary weeks which must be passed before the spring campaign opens. I study all that I can, but the need of various books makes me restless. In Doctor Hayward's absence I have been acting as chief surgeon of the brigade, with the care of five regiments, so that is not being idle, at any rate.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

December 27th, 1863.

It is raining and blowing fearfully, but I am snug and dry under my canvas shelter, where, in a little space ten feet square, is combined bedroom, sitting-room, and office; for I am still living in a tent, as I cannot find sufficient wood to build a hut. It is dull enough, with nothing to do and nothing new to hear. I spend hours alone in my tent, thinking of the future; questioning and answering myself. This seems to me a desert that I am now passing through, which must be crossed before I can dream of home; before an earned contentment would satisfy me to settle down to practise my profession.

January 1st, 1864.

To-night is the coldest night we have had yet, and the wind blows so that the fire will not burn. Poor Bond has turned in with all his clothes and overcoat on. I

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

have not undressed, excepting to bathe, since being in this camp; but I am as tough as iron.

To-day Macy and I were invited by General Webb, commanding our division, and General Hancock, commanding our corps, to call upon them and drink to the success of the Army of the Potomac. General Hancock was wounded at Gettysburg, and has just now sufficiently recovered to take command again. I had a delightful time, and dined with General Webb.

Did you see the puff about the Twentieth in the Boston "Advertiser?" It was excellent.

January 15th, 1864.

I am out on picket duty, as the surgeon detailed for the work is ill. General Hancock has forbidden covers or fires at the outposts, and consequently half of the men from the picket line come back ill, as they are exposed to the inclemency of the

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

weather for three days at a time. There is nothing in the world to do here, and at night we have to lie on the snow and try to sleep, frozen almost to death. The cold has been most unusual this winter. The hardest battles I have fought since joining the army have been with myself. Some time I hope to conquer — much? Yes, well-nigh everything!

January 24th, 1864.

Last Thursday, as the adjutant was absent, I was asked to conduct dress parade in his place. Abbott tells me that I did not make a single mistake, — pretty good for this old boy!

The building of a bathing-house has interested me, and by to-night every man in the regiment will have had a bath, which, I trust, will diminish the number on the sick-list.

I endure the incarceration (for to me no other word will answer) of camp life

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

with what fortitude I can, but this fortitude is only due to the little iron crook — hope — which is always with me.

The nights now are brilliant with moonlight and wonderfully beautiful. Last night I could not remain in my tent and lose all the beauty outside, so ordered my horse saddled and started off alone. For about an hour I enjoyed it hugely; but on my return, got into a bog which thoroughly wet me, and from that moment my ardor was so dampened that I forgot there had ever been a moon.

February 7th, 1864.

Harry Abbott returned last night from his furlough, and Wendell Holmes, Jr., with him. It seemed strange enough to hear them talk of Boston affairs, balls, and such like. Wendell is very blue, and sits over the fire, shivering. It is an awful strain to jump from every comfort into this rough life. Last night we bundled

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

him up in buffaloes, blankets, overcoats, and tents; yet he suffered and could not sleep. Air-tight houses and furnace heat unfits one for this sort of thing. It is, of course, much colder at the North than here, but it is the dampness of the cold in this locality which pierces to the very marrow.

February 15th, 1864.

One day's routine is much like another, varied only by storm or sunshine. Yesterday the monotony was relieved by a cavalry review. There were six thousand horsemen, commanded by General Pleasanton, who manœuvred them on an open plain large enough to hold ten thousand more, and the sight was grand and imposing, — a tremendous exhibition of force in reserve.

You can have no idea of the bitter cold of the last few days. Even the pail of water for bathing, which I set in the fireplace, freezes! The ink in my pen freezes

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

as I write. Last night, beside being in my bag with a single blanket over me, I had outside of that two overcoats, haversacks, boots, and every variety of thing, yet was too cold to sleep. One of our officers had three of his toes frozen during the night, while in bed. I am all puckered up by this weather, but find it healthy.

ON PICKET, March 20th, 1864.

I am not fond of picket duty at any time, but under present conditions it is almost intolerable. I came out here yesterday among a lot of ignorant, swearing, drinking officers, unknown to me, and all intensely disagreeable. They amuse themselves by card playing, toadying their privates, rough talk; and I expect a row with them every moment. They allow their favorites among the privates to eat and drink with them, but I told the commanding officer yesterday that I did not allow a private to come into my quarters in camp,

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

and should not here, and if he wished to talk to one, it must be outside, and not while I was in the hut. The officer looked at me pretty sharply, as if he meant to be insulting, and I was prepared for it; but he merely said, "You officers of the Twentieth Mass. treat your privates different from what we do, but if you don't like this man here I'll send him out," which he did. If he had not complied with my demand, I should have brought charges against him, and this he well knew.

April 13th, 1864.

General Gibbon reviewed our division to-day, and for a wonder the weather was pleasant. Abbott led the column behind the band; then the adjutant and I followed, and, be it whispered, my old Bess and her rider felt so gay, not to say self-conscious, that it was extremely difficult for the latter to salute the general with his sword, which, by the way, was borrowed.



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

This morning I was awakened by feeling myself tightly held, seeing Hayward's face close to mine, and hearing him say in some agitation, "John, don't move for your life till I say 'three,' then seize my hands and spring to your feet. One, two, three!" Up I sprang, and never made a cleaner jump, but just in time to see a moccasin snake dive under my coat, which I had used for a pillow. Armed with sticks, we dragged the coat away, but saw only the hole into which the snake had glided. I was glad afterwards we missed killing him, for he had lain coiled almost under the back of my neck, and, as it proved, waited patiently for me to move and let him enter his hole; so I feel rather pleased that his patience was rewarded.

More than one hundred German recruits have arrived to-day, and I have examined them. These fellows, who have just left their own country and now find themselves in a foreign army, where an unknown

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

tongue is spoken, are already singing their camp songs, merry as crickets.

The band of the first division, which is the best in the army, played this evening at the fort on the hill. The air was so filled with melody I could barely stand it. I used to listen comfortably to music, but now, although the enjoyment is far greater, I listen painfully.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

### CHAPTER XII

#### THE COMMENCEMENT OF GRANT'S CAMPAIGN

**G**ENERAL GRANT has appointed the day after to-morrow to review our corps. Yesterday he reviewed the Sixth corps, and all through the review sat on his horse and smoked a cigar. He never even uncovered his head when the colors were dipped in passing him.

April 19th, 1864.

On Friday our division was reviewed by General Hancock in the presence of Generals Meade, Sedgwick, and half a dozen others. The regiment had again the post of honor, — the right of the column. It was complimented on every side, — and let me say that it is very rare for the com-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

manding general to compliment an individual regiment; but on that day all of them said they had never seen more splendid marching, and also that they had no idea there was such a regiment in the service. After the review the generals went to General Gibbon's headquarters for a collation. General Meade then asked General Gibbon to send for the Twentieth, as he wished to see it manœuvre, after which the officers of the Twentieth were invited to the collation. The rumor is that after to-morrow no mails will be allowed to go North.

April 20th, 1864.

It is a cold, cloudy, cheerless day, and I confess my condition is like the weather. I am blue and homesick. Yes, this may seem extraordinary, but to me it is as common in this dull life as to see the stars in the sky. There is too little occupation; I am read out and wearied to death.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

To-day, beside my sick calls, I have done nothing but loaf with my hands in my pockets, from tent to tent, for it has been too cold to sit outside, and my chimney has smoked too much for a fire. Most of the time my eyes stream with tears from the constant smoke I live in. Yesterday, for variety, and the hope of benefit, I shaved off my mustache, — but I allow it did take moral courage, — and then had a most laughable time calling upon our officers at their respective huts. Not one of them recognized me until I spoke, and then they roared with laughter. Not so with Abbott and Uncle Nathan, though. They were really put out with me, and saw no joke whatever, — said I looked like the devil, and I think Abbott would have liked to put me under guard, and for the simple reason that the loss of a mustache broke the military uniformity of the regiment!

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

May 3rd, 1864.

At last orders have come to move, and now commences the campaign of 1864 under Grant. How will it end? It has begun, at least, in secrecy, for no one seems to know what is to be done beyond marching, and that marching under Grant means moving towards the enemy.

As is usual, after a winter's rest and idleness in camp, the men open a new campaign with an excess of spirit. We crossed the river without opposition, and late in the afternoon struck the Fredericksburg Turnpike, which we followed in what seemed to be a westerly direction. Before long we heard sharp musketry firing, toward which we made our way, and about dusk struck a road running south and at right angles to that which we were on. Here we halted, and were told to bivouac under arms against a rail fence, which stood between us and the thick woods

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

where the firing was. The woods were so dense that we could not distinguish the artillery firing from the rest of the reports, but the sound continued until dark.

Hot firing opened at daybreak, and it seemed so near that when orders came to "fall in line," the new German recruits simply would not obey. They were so terrified that they lay like logs, and no amount of rough handling, even with bayonets, had any effect upon them whatever. The order to advance was given; still these fellows clung to the ground with faces buried in the grass, and, although some were shot by the officers, literally nothing moved them.

"Go on," was the next order, and on we went, leaving the miserable wretches lying there, — a few may have fallen into line, but I doubt it. We pushed forward, and very quickly were walking over rows of dead bodies piled at times two and three deep, and they lay in lines, exactly as if

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

mowed down, showing the havoc of yesterday's fight. These lines seemed to be equally distant one from the other, as if each body of men advanced a certain distance, received a volley, then advanced again, and received another. I noticed a man near me in the ranks at this time singing a hymn with all his might and main. His head was thrown back, his mouth wide open, and he seemed completely absorbed in the emotion called forth to the hymn, which made him oblivious of all surroundings. I watched him curiously, and understood that it was an instinctive impulse on his part to try to hold his senses together and to steady himself under the well-nigh unendurable strain. As long as I saw the fellow, he kept his place without stumbling, and obeyed orders.

The right of the Twentieth bore on the turnpike for about two miles, when we met the enemy and the fighting began. I



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

stationed myself just behind the regiment in the woods on the side of the road, and opened my hospital paraphernalia; then sent the stretcher-bearers over the field. Soon I was deep in work.

Meanwhile reserves were brought up, and among them I saw General Bartlett at the head of his brigade; but we had time only for a passing salute. Shortly after that an orderly came towards me, leading a horse, with an officer in the saddle, back from the front. The man was bent far over the horse's neck, bleeding profusely from a wound in the head, and white as death. To my dismay, I saw it was Frank Bartlett, and I called his name again and again, but did not succeed in rousing him. Passing my finger into the wound before taking him from the saddle, I found the ball had not penetrated the bone, but had simply severed an artery in the scalp; so, pressing the artery till the steward brought a ligature,

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

I shouted, "No harm done, old boy; this is only a flesh wound; you will be all right when I tie the artery and take a stitch or two"; and this good news seemed to bring him back to consciousness. I then laid him on the ground, and, after my work was finished, gave him a good horn of whiskey and very soon he rallied completely.

"John," he said, "I thought I was done for. Well, old fellow, if I'm all right, here goes!" and before I could stop him he had sprung into the saddle, waved his hand to me, and was off to the front again as fast as his horse could carry him. Such is the mental power of the two little words "death" and "life."

About the middle of the afternoon General Hancock rode up and told me to stop work and send all my wounded to the rear, as our troops were to fall back. This was tough and hot work, but I gathered all I could find and fell back with the rest.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

May —, 1864.

Something happened to me in this retreat to the crossroads which Hayward says was a heat-stroke, for there was no exposure to the sun, as I was sheltered by the woods. I remember nothing from the time General Hancock ordered me back and the wounded were sent off, till I found myself lying under an apple-tree, with "Uncle Nathan" sponging my head with cold water. My steward says that while on the retreat I talked incoherently, then ran and shouted, until he guided me to the Division Hospital, where I fell unconscious.

When I came to my senses sufficiently to sit up, Hayward told me that our little Abbott (at that time major, but acting colonel) had been shot through the abdomen and was dying. Dying! It was too dreadful to bear! Harry Abbott was an ideal man; an ideal officer, revered by his friends and deeply respected by all

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

who knew him. What will become of the Twentieth without him I cannot imagine; for he was its life, its discipline, and its success.<sup>1</sup>

THE WILDERNESS, May 7th, 1864.

I am safe and well, but our losses have been fearful. Poor Abbott is dead; Macy has a slight wound in the leg, not dangerous; Bond is shot in the jaw, but doing well; Walcott in the shoulder, and three others badly wounded.

During the first day's fight I was with the regiment, but now I am detailed to the hospital with Dr. Hayward, three miles in the rear. I have been operating all day, and really learned more in the way of experience than in all the time since joining the regiment.

<sup>1</sup> Major Abbott was shot through the body, and lived for about eight hours after. He left all his money to the widows and orphans of the regiment. General Gibbon wrote to his father that he was considered the most valuable officer in the corps.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

May 8th, 1864.

Exhaustion and confusion worse confounded. Although perfectly well, I am tired and hot, having slept only a couple of hours out of the last forty. We are still in the Wilderness, fighting our way inch by inch. The Twentieth has been in no important action since I last wrote; our loss was then so terrible that they have spared us a little. Curtis is now in command, as Captain Paton was shot in the hand; but we cannot induce him to go to the rear.

The Confederates fight determinedly, and their force facing us is almost equal to ours, but we drive them each day. We are both on a race for Richmond, and I wonder which will get the inside track. If we do, our journey will be forty miles shorter than theirs. Feeling as I do now, the thought of a forty-mile march is quite repulsive. Grant seems determined

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

to keep on fighting, and either win or lose.

I now sit on the ground in the woods, leaning against a log and writing on my knee. I am surrounded by soldiers, bonfires, and kicking horses, — but out of their reach, I assure you; dust is sweeping over me like smoke; my face is black with dirt and perspiration, clothes soiled and torn almost to pieces. I am too tired to sleep, too tired to stand, and should dislike to have you see me just now. Although we have been steadily banging away at each other for a week, neither side has gained much advantage. The enemy has gradually fallen back, but each day shows a bold front.

The sun is just setting, thank God! but it is uncertain whether we shall march all night, go out on picket, or lie down and sleep, — the thought of sleep makes me absolutely silly. We never know what we may be doing the next five minutes.



THE COUNTRY THROUGH WHICH THE BATTLE OF THE WILDERNESS  
WAS FOUGHT — A PONTOON BRIDGE





## OF THE CIVIL WAR

Hello! Here come two hundred "Johnnies" as prisoners. They look defiant. I would in their place.

May 11th, 1864.

My last writing was interrupted by orders to march, and fighting has been constant during the last three days. I am well, and incessantly at work over the wounded. I send this through a "Christian Commission" man, who goes North to-day.

May 13th, 1864.

Fighting still, — ten days of it without intermission. I am so exhausted and nervous it is difficult to express myself; am operating day and night. This thing cannot last much longer, for one side or the other must yield from sheer exhaustion.

I am trying to gather together the Twentieth, but so far can find but two officers, no men, no colors. The only privates I have discovered are here in the hospital, and

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

apparently there is almost nothing left of the dear old regiment.

WILDERNESS NEAR  
SPOTTSYLVANIA COURT-HOUSE,  
DIVISION HOSPITAL, May 17th, 1864.

Seventeen days since I have heard a word from the North. Not a single mail has been sent us since we left winter quarters.

We now find that six officers of the Twentieth are living (excluding Surgeon Hayward and myself) out of twenty who started with us. I am at present detailed to run the Division Hospital with Dr. Divenell.

Surgeons captured by the enemy are well treated and immediately paroled; in fact, they are scarcely noticed, much less disturbed. If one happens to have on a good pair of boots, he is generally relieved of them, which, under the circumstances, seems quite fair and proper. I have talked to many Confederates, and some of the offi-

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

cers admit terrible losses on their side, and seem discouraged. They tell me that we never fought so determinedly, so fiercely, or so long at a time as in this campaign, and that they could not possibly stand another such siege. For ten days the battle raged each day, we being the assaulting party. We have been comparatively quiet the last two days, burying our dead.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

### CHAPTER XIII

#### CAPTAIN KELLIHER'S WOUNDS

**I**T has rained every day for a week; the mud is several feet deep, and the men thoroughly water-logged, but, nevertheless, they are cheerful and ready to begin the contest again. I dread the results of a fight, but must confess, as it seems the only way of forcing the end, I want to go ahead.

BANKS OF THE MATTAPONY RIVER,

May 22nd, 1864.

We are not allowed mail facilities in this campaign, and our only opportunities for sending letters North are by the wounded on their way to the rear. I have material enough for fifty letters, but dare not risk it in the hands of wounded privates.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

Our corps, the Second, is separated from the main army. We made a forced march to this place, which is called Milford, night before last and yesterday. We are two miles from Bowling Green, by the Fredericksburg and Richmond Railroad, and on the banks of the Mattaponi River. General Hancock made this move successfully, but with a loss of about fifty of his cavalry. This is the route by which General Lee sent all his wounded to Richmond. We are almost directly in General Lee's rear, — at any rate, so far in his rear that it is probable he will have to fall back in order to fight us. We have entrenched ourselves as securely as we can, and the river covers both our flanks. The Second corps is estimated at twenty-five thousand men.

On one of the recent days of fighting, at early dawn the troops were in line, when the order was given to charge without noise. While on the run, — I follow-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

ing with my hospital steward about twenty yards in the rear of the men, — we saw in a clump of bushes a pair of boots with soles up, as if the owner had taken a head-long leap into the hedge. Stopping to investigate, I pulled out Captain Kelliher of the Twentieth. He was horribly mangled about the face and neck, as if from a shell or solid shot; yet no gun had been heard, and no one seen to leave the ranks.

I found him bleeding freely from a laceration of the subclavian artery, showing that the injury could only have been received a moment before, else he would have bled to death. He was still living, though unconscious, and after tying the artery, so as to stop the hemorrhage, he was placed on a stretcher and carried to the rear. The fighting lasted but a short time; as the Confederates were but partially surprised, they rallied and held us in check.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

As soon as the Division Hospital tents were up, I had Kelliher taken to Dr. Hayward, who, finding him still alive, though yet unconscious, decided to remove the shattered bones and to clean and stitch the wounds, so as to give him all the comfort possible, but with no hope of saving his life. Under the chloroform the captain rallied still more, and a few hours after our work was finished he finally became conscious. Dr. Hayward had removed the shattered lower jaw, the whole arm, including a shoulder-blade, or scapula, the clavicle, or collar-bone, and a large part of the first two ribs on the same side of the body, as all these broken bones were lacerating the flesh, and the surfaces of the lung were exposed. When the operation was completed, the line of suture for closing the wounds ran from the ear to within an inch or two of the pelvis.

I placed the patient under my shelter tent, and ordered the steward to feed and

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

stimulate him as directed. In the night it rained so hard that I dug a trench about him to keep him from being drenched and chilled. The following day we were ordered to push on, and to place the wounded, who were unable to march, in army wagons destined for the "White House Landing," which was twenty miles away. What was to become of poor Kelliher? Surely he could never survive such a strain, even though at the time he was doing well. After much deliberation I decided to consult the captain himself, and to follow his decision. In presenting to him the situation, I offered to remain with him in case he wished to be left, and told him that we must simply make up our minds to be captured by the enemy; but his answer was clear and prompt: "I will go to the White House Landing, Doctor, and, Doctor, I *shall* live." So, doing what was possible to make him comfortable with the use of straw and grass by way of a mattress, I



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

bade him good-bye, never dreaming that he could survive such a journey.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Captain Kelliher, after complete recovery, rejoined the Twentieth and was commissioned its major, and remained in active service with the regiment till the end of the war.

# LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

## CHAPTER XIV

### OPERATING AND MARCHING

TWO MILES FROM HANOVER JUNCTION,

May 24th, 1864.

**I** CAN scratch only a few lines, being up to my elbows in blood. Oh, the fatigue and endless work we surgeons have! About one night in three to sleep in, and then we are so nervous and played out that sleep is impossible.

The hospital is fast filling up with poor fellows who last night charged upon the enemy's works on the other side of the river. We are some fifteen miles nearer Richmond than when I last wrote, and the strongest works of the Confederacy are at this point and at the South Anna River. They were thrown up during the first year of the war.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

It looks now as if we should still compel the enemy to fall back. We have had a deal of forced marching lately, and the heat has been almost intolerable. At times it has seemed as if the sun's rays would lay us out, yet we march all day, and through volumes upon volumes of dense dust. News has just come that the Confederates are falling back, and so I suppose we must pack our wounded into wagons and move after them with all the speed possible.

It seems to me I am quite callous to death now, and that I could see my dearest friend die without much feeling. This condition tells a long story which, under other circumstances, could scarcely be imagined. During the last three weeks I have seen probably no less than two thousand deaths, and among them those of many dear friends. I have witnessed hundreds of men shot dead, have walked and slept among them, and surely I feel it possible to die myself as calmly as any, — but

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

enough of this. The fight is now fearful, and ambulances are coming in with great rapidity, each bearing its suffering load.

FIFTEEN MILES FROM WHITE HOUSE ON  
YORK RIVER, May 30th, 1864.

We are now fourteen miles from Richmond, having marched pretty steadily southward ever since I last wrote. Oh, why will not the Confederacy burst up! True, we are drawing very near to Richmond, but the tug of war will come at the Chickahominy River. Although the Confederates had the shortest road, we rather stole a march upon them this time before they could reach and stop us, and, by making a hard, forced march, we saved many lives. The morale of the enemy is injured by their falling back in retreat so far, while that of our army is correspondingly improved. They are now pretty near their last ditch, and the fight there will be fierce and strong. I work day and night, and

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

when not busy with the sick and wounded  
am on the tedious march.

COLD HARBOR, June 4th, 1864.

I have not had a moment to write for nearly a week. It has been fight, fight, fight. Every day there is a fight, and every day the hospital is again filled. For four days now we have been operating upon the men wounded in one battle, which lasted only about two hours; but the wounds were more serious than those from former engagements. I am heart-sick over it all. If the Confederates lost in each fight the same number as we, there would be more chance for us; but their loss is about one man to our five, from the fact that they never leave their earth-works, whereas our men are obliged to charge even when there is not the slightest chance of taking them. Three several times after capturing these works our troops were unsupported and had to evacu-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

ate immediately, with great loss. The men are becoming discouraged, but there is plenty of fight in them yet.

June 7th, 1864.

For the first time, I believe, since this campaign commenced, I am lying upon my blankets at twelve o'clock, noon. This morning early we sent almost every man in the hospital to the "White House," to make room for others. Under a flag of truce, we asked permission of the enemy to take off our wounded who were lying between the two lines. This, of course, prevented all hostilities, and we surgeons are having a few hours' rest.

June 10th, 1864.

The front lines are within thirty yards of the Confederate works, — indeed, so near that a biscuit could easily be tossed into them. On neither side do the men dare show their heads above the entrench-

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

ments, for it is almost sure death to do so. The sharpshooters on both sides are so placed that they can pick off anything which appears in sight.

We have had thirty of our division wounded to-day by shell which the Confederates manage to throw into our pits, but we are successful in dropping some into theirs also. The heat is intolerable, and the roads are covered with dust six or eight inches deep, which every gust of wind sweeps up, covering everything with a dirty, white coating.

# LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DEATH OF LIEUTENANT G—— OF THE SHARPSHOOTERS

HOSPITAL NEAR PETERSBURG,

June 20th, 1864.

OUR division is relieved from duty in the front line, where it has fought ever since the campaign commenced. Yesterday another brave officer, Lieutenant G—— of the Twentieth regiment, was killed, and so uselessly, too.

Lieutenant G—— was in command of the sharpshooters attached to the regiment, but who are not under its absolute control. They form an independent organization, going where they can most injure the enemy. We had been fighting for several days in the most advanced trenches amidst persistent firing from both sides,



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

which, however, did little damage, except to prevent all rest and sleep. Finally both armies saw the folly of such warfare and desisted. Towards noon yesterday, weary, I suppose, of the inaction, a Confederate sharpshooter mounted his earthwork and challenged any one of our sharpshooters to single combat. Lieutenant G——, a fine fellow, standing at least six feet two in his stockings, accepted the challenge, and they commenced what to them was sport. Life is cheap in this campaign! Both fired, and the Confederate dropped. G——'s great size was so unusual that his opponent had the advantage, and our men tried to make him give way to a smaller man. But, no! He would not listen, became very excited as his successes multiplied; and when darkness stopped the duelling he remained unscathed, while every opponent had fallen victim to his unerring aim.

The lieutenant was so exhilarated that he claimed with much bluster a charmed life;

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

said nothing would kill him; that he could stand any amount of duelling, and this he would prove in the morning. When he was in his tent for the night, we officers used every argument and entreaty to convince him of the foolhardiness and criminality of such a course, and also assured him of the certainty of his death. But the man seemed crazed with the faith in his charmed life. He would not yield his determination, and when we left him was simply waiting, as best he could, for daylight to begin the duelling again.

As we all foretold, he was finally killed, but his death was due to treachery. In the morning, true to his mistaken conviction, he stood upon the works again and challenged an opponent. Instantly one appeared, and as both were taking aim, a man from another part of the Confederate line fired and shot G—— through the mouth, the ball lodging in the spinal vertebræ, completely paralyzing him below the head.

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

We dragged the poor, deluded fellow to his tent, where, after uttering inarticulately, "I hit him any way, Doctor," he died.

We then heard a tremendous uproar outside, and found that our men were claiming the murderer of their lieutenant; but the Confederates shouted that they had already shot him for a cowardly villain, and then came praises across the line for Lieutenant G——'s pluck and skill.

I remember another instance of unjustifiable shooting which occurred last year, but under very different circumstances. Our division was standing idle, while the skirmishers of another Federal corps and the skirmishers of the enemy were disputing the possession of an open field. Our general, in watching them, saw that the Confederate officer in command was superior to ours, and by his skilful manœuvres was gradually driving the Federal skirmishers in. Turning to one of Lieutenant

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

G——'s sharpshooters, who was standing by his side, he said, "Can you pick off that man?" pointing to the officer. "I think so," was the answer, and raising his rifle, he fired, and, as we say, "dropped him."

The sharpshooter's rifle had a telescope attached, and this brought the officer, who was some three hundred yards away, close to. Nevertheless, it was a remarkable shot; but I am thankful to say that every man who witnessed the act pronounced it contemptible and cowardly. The manœuvre was not against our division; we were not involved, but simply looking on, and later even the general acknowledged and deeply regretted his fatal impulse.

# OF THE CIVIL WAR

## CHAPTER XVI

### A DELIGHTFUL EPISODE

HOSPITAL NEAR PETERSBURG,

June 21st, 1864.

GENERAL GRANT has made a strategical movement, and here we find ourselves, after a very circuitous but rapid march, south of the James River and pegging away at the side door of Petersburg. This movement was on a very extensive scale, but accomplished without accident or unnecessary delay. The day we started all surgeons were ordered to join their respective commands, but I, being attached to the hospital, was obliged to remain with it. In other words, I had to follow the hospital wagons, look after the stores, and attend the sick and wounded in the ambulances. These wagons

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

took the same route as the troops but kept far in their rear. The heat each day was intense, and the dust beyond any expression of which I am capable; but suffice it to say that most of the time I could not even see the head of my horse. The whole train was fifty miles long, the roads sandy, and we moved with the heavy draw of great bodies. We marched about sixty miles in four days and nights, halting every six or eight hours to bait horse and man. Little opportunity was given us for sleep, and, separated from Hayward and Macy, I felt at times tired and restless, as the officers near me were disagreeable fellows, who often amused themselves by entering the houses along the route and stealing everything they could lay their hands upon.

Some pitiable sights I saw! Although the officers did nothing really cruel, the example they set to their men was demoralizing in the extreme. Such wanton

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destruction of property, such pillage and forage I never saw equalled.

I stopped at a house to ask for a drink of water and, finding the front door open, knocked and stepped inside. An elderly lady came to the door in great distress, and seeing that I was an officer, exclaimed, "Oh, sir, if you have a heart, protect us! The soldiers are taking everything we have to live on; no food will be left our children; we shall starve!" She then led me into a room where were two ladies, two young girls, several small children, and an old gentleman, all clinging to one another and sobbing as though their hearts would break.

I said that I would do all in my power to help them. I advised them immediately to collect from the place everything in the way of food that it was possible to scrape up, — chickens, pigs, corn, etc., — which they proceeded to do, and after a long time returned with two old hens,

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

a few hams, and about a barrel of corn. When these were locked in a room upstairs, I offered them my protection until the wagon train had passed, at which the old gentleman dropped on his knees in prayer; and I did not wonder, for the whole situation was pitiful enough, — a family of eight huddled together, each looking to the other for courage to support life, while rude hands snatch everything, leaving starvation behind.

My position was no sinecure, for the men rushed in and attempted to search the house upstairs, and it was only by standing on the stairs with pistol drawn that I could prevent their doing so. I waited till long after the train had passed, and then managed to procure for these poor people from our quartermaster coffee, sugar, and hardtack, — articles which they had not seen for months. It is difficult to imagine the varied suffering of these Southerners, many of them used to great



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

luxury; yet, of course, their experience spells war, and sometimes in my imagination that one word is swollen till it almost bursts with all it includes.

After joining the train again, and while riding with one of the lieutenants in charge, as a great cloud of dust rolled off, we saw through the intervening branches of trees a scene so apart from our own condition of dirt and confusion that it seemed like a dream. It was a stately old-time homestead, surrounded by rich lawns and cultivated fields, with an air of such calm and dignity, such seclusion and peace, that, although we feared to trespass and so break the charm which seemed to shelter it, the longing for its rest and refreshment proved irresistible. Turning our horses' heads towards the spot, we were quickly there, and then found that the freshness of this lovely oasis was due to a serpentine twist of the Chickahominy River, which almost completely enclosed the plantation.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

Riding up the fine old avenue of what we supposed a deserted house, — as the blinds were tightly closed and absolute stillness prevailed, — we reached the big front porch; then dismounting, we tied our horses, and, sitting upon the hospitable steps, drank in the sweetness and silence of the place with intense delight. Suddenly we heard a click behind us, as of a key turned in its socket. Instinctively neither of us showed that we noticed the sound. Feeling ready for any emergency, we quietly awaited further developments.

Again came a noise, a decided creak, and we became sure that some one was scanning us through the open door. Still we did not turn, for, in spite of the possibility of danger, the relief we felt in our surroundings roused a spirit of fun and adventure. This proved too much for the curiosity of the party in the doorway, and presently a refined and gentle voice asked, “What do you wish, gentlemen?”

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

We were instantly on our feet and bowing to an old lady who was standing in the open door. I answered, "Nothing, madam, but to be allowed to enjoy the quiet and beauty here for a few minutes."

She ventured nearer. "You belong to the Union forces, I see. What State are you from?" I told her Massachusetts. "From Boston?" "Yes, madam," and noticing in her kind face more interest, I asked if she had associations there.

A long pause followed, and I saw something was being considered, for instead of answering me she turned to the lieutenant, saying, "May I ask where your home is, sir?" "Pennsylvania," he answered. Another pause. Finally, looking straight into my eyes, she said, "I had a son in Harvard College." "In what class?" I asked. "In the class of '62." "Why, that was my class originally," I said; "may I ask his name?"

When she gave me this and heard that

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

I knew him well, in spite of the gathering tears and quivering lips, she looked pleased and helped. Laying her hand upon my arm, she said, "My husband and son are both away in the Confederate service, and this is our home. Here are our traditions"; then drawing herself erect with old-time dignity, she added, "my husband and son are fighting for them, sir, while my daughters and I are enduring for them."

In spite of this quiet assertion of Southern principle, I was sure that my companionship with her boy in college gave to his mother a sense of protection in my presence, so that for the time, at least, she felt some relief and rest.

"I would like my daughters to meet a classmate of their brother," she said, and, as she called them by name in the hall, the lieutenant, with eyes brimful of fun, whispered to me, "By George, there are two of them."

We heard the bang of a distant door,

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steps flying over the stairs, and then two such pretty girls burst into the room that to us, who had long been unused to anything but dust and dirt, their freshness and their dainty muslin dresses seemed but a part of the beautiful old place and the spell that held it.

The old lady introduced us, and soon we were chatting away as old playmates might have done. They told us of their mother's fears for them while our troops were passing, and of their consequently being shut up in some distant attic. We sang college songs to their accompaniment on the piano; we sang and we laughed, as if there were no such thing as war about us.

Finally, and reluctantly, we rose to take our leave, saying — I fear a little lamely — that we were in a hurry to rejoin our regiment; but the old lady, who had left the room, now returned and most cordially invited us to lunch; whereupon, I must con-

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

fess, all sense of hurry disappeared, and after some slight demur, really impossible to persist in, we gladly and thankfully accepted her hospitality. We had a fine lunch, which means that everything was dainty, fresh, and abundant, and we were doing full justice to the occasion, when terrific yells and howls interrupted us. Rushing to the piazza, we saw a lot of cavalry men sprawling and rolling on the ground, kicking, struggling, and screaming. They were being attacked by a perfect army of bees whose hive they had been robbing, and were in absolute agony, yet their quick retribution made the scene almost ludicrous.

I soon discovered that foraging was going on everywhere, and started to do what I could to stop it, when I met the officer in command of the cavalry and asked his protection for the place, telling him the circumstances of our presence there. I saw a twinkle in his eye as he

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

promised to stop the foraging, and added that he would then call upon the ladies himself. Following him to see that he fulfilled his word, we approached the front porch of the house, from which a perfect bedlam of sounds greeted us, — squeals, cries, and men's coarse voices, — in the midst of which we could distinguish the lieutenant's commands and the entreaties of the ladies.

When we reached the door we saw two great cavalymen coming downstairs, each bearing a pig on his shoulders. The lieutenant was uselessly ordering them to give up their booty, and the ladies scolding and protesting at this "brutal robbery." The cavalry officer commanded his men to "Halt!" which they did, still holding the pigs, however; then holding the parlor door open for the ladies to pass in, he ordered the men to carry back the pigs to the place where they had found them, but in such a half-authoritative way that

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

oaths were his only answer. This made the officer so angry that he drew his sword and belabored them over their heads and shoulders, while they rushed through the open door, bearing away their victims in triumph.

The foraging was stopped after this, however, and peace restored to the old place. The cavalrymen rode off in one direction and the lieutenant and I in another, after taking leave of the ladies and receiving their affectionate farewell. Many a backward glance did we give at the beautiful old place; and until the view was obscured we saw those two pretty girls waving their handkerchiefs to us from the veranda.



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

### CHAPTER XVII

#### FIELD HOSPITAL NEAR PETERSBURG

June 24th, 1864.

I AM up to my neck in work. It is slaughter, slaughter. Our brigade has met with a sad loss by having three entire regiments gobbled up as prisoners. The Twentieth fortunately escaped. This misfortune was caused by the second brigade giving way before the attack of the enemy and exposing the flank of our own. The enemy, before we knew it, was in our rear, and resistance was absurd. Major Hooper, who commanded the brigade, was the only one of the Fifteenth Massachusetts who escaped. He received a slight wound in the arm, however, and started for home yesterday. Lucky fellow! No time for writing more.

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

June 27th, 1864.

When our division was withdrawn from the extreme front, where it has been since the beginning of the campaign, we surgeons looked for a little less arduous work; but now the artillery brigade has been placed under our care, and we have as much to do as ever. It has not rained for a month, and the poor wounded fellows lie all about me, suffering intensely from heat and flies. The atmosphere is almost intolerable from the immense quantity of decomposing animal and vegetable matter upon the ground. Many of the surgeons are ill, and I indulge in large doses of quinine. Horses and mules die by hundreds from continued hard labor and scant feed. The roads are strewn with them, and the decay of these, with that of human bodies in the trenches, causes malaria of the worst kind.

War! war! war! I often think that



AN AMBULANCE REMOVING THE WOUNDED



## OF THE CIVIL WAR

in the future, when human character shall have deepened, there will be a better way of settling affairs than this of plunging into a perfect maelstrom of horror.

FIELD HOSPITAL, June 29th, 1864.

Rumor says that the Twentieth is to be mustered out of service on the 18th of July.

Grant is winding his forces round Petersburg. Our infantry is about two miles from the Weldon Railroad, and it is reported that our cavalry have cut the railroad lower down. The Confederates are close to starvation, especially the women and children, and yet there is no sign of their yielding.

Our division has again been put in the front line of rifle-pits, and again the poor wounded fellows will be coming in. All this accumulation of experience quickly changes careless boys into sober and thoughtful men,—men who trust, and

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

who feel that whatever happens, in the end it will somehow be for the best; men who value what has not cost them a thought before. I know of a little book, carried in breast pocket or knapsack, — indeed, wherever it may seem safest, — that has now become a dependence amid suffering and privation.

July 2nd, 1864.

For several days I have had no time to write.

The report to-night is that the Second corps is to take transports for Maryland. This may be true or not. We have few wounded men in the hospital, but a great many sick. However, the army is, on the whole, comparatively healthy. Harry Abbott's loss still shadows my every thought; I cannot yet think of it with any composure. When the little monograph of his life was taken to General Hancock by Captain Paton, General Hancock said, "I am sorry, Captain, that my opinion

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

of Major Abbott is not expressed here as well as General Gibbon's. Every general in the army knew Major Abbott. He was the best regimental commander I ever saw. His position was such that he could not be promoted as we all desired to have him, but had he lived he would have had by this time a brigade, at least, to command."

July 4th, 1864.

Water is very scarce here; wells have to be dug to the depth of forty feet, and then the water not only runs in slowly, but is very muddy. Ice found in a house on one of the plantations has been a God-send to the hospital during this heat, but it has all gone now.

The question of my going home with the regiment still absorbs me. At one hour I am told there will be no difficulty in being mustered out with the others, and then some order comes from the War Department, or from the surgeon-general,

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

and I am left high and dry in doubt. For two weeks this has continued, and it wearies me. The medical director of the corps says he cannot spare me, and yet I am sorely needed at home.

Somehow I felt that General Grant would attack all along the lines to-day and send North a message of victory; but instead of that, this has been the quietest day of the campaign. Now and then the booming of a gun is heard, but no firing of small arms. I think from the unusual calm that the general expects to gain more by keeping quiet and allowing starvation to fight for him in the Confederate ranks, than he could by making a general attack. The railroads running into Richmond have all been cut.

July 8th, 1864.

The Twentieth Massachusetts is to be consolidated into a battalion of seven companies, and an order just issued by the War Department says that officers not having



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served three years from the last muster will be retained, if needed. According to this order, not an individual officer, except the quartermaster, can be mustered out on the 18th, when the regiment is supposed to go home.

It is intolerably hot, and has been for some time. No rain has fallen since the last of May. Our hospital is now in the woods close to the highway, and we have the benefit of the dust, which so incessantly sweeps over us that we eat and breathe it until almost suffocated by it.

July 18th, 1864.

I am retained, and General Hancock says I must remain.

Dr. Hayward and I have our quarters back of the hospital in a little nook, with green boughs to cover us. I visit the Twentieth about once a week, but it is almost too sad to go there, as so many of the old familiar faces are gone. I still hope that I

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

may be mustered out of service before very long, however. I know very well that General Hancock from his standpoint is right to retain me, but all the same it seems as if I could not bear it. If I remained in the army until September I should be made surgeon, but I do not care a fig for that.

CAMP ON THE BANKS OF THE JAMES,

July 29th, 1864.

Here we are on a so-called raid, but it seems to me a mighty hard, hot, tedious campaign. We left our camp at sundown on the 27th, and marched all night and part of the next day to this place.

General F., who held the north bank of the river, was furiously attacked by the Confederates, and his men behaved disgracefully, — threw down their arms and skedaddled at the first appearance of the enemy, so that our whole corps, with the addition of twelve thousand cavalry, had to be sent here to recover the lost ground;

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but it is also intended to draw the enemy's right wing from near Petersburg, so as to enable the Federal troops to blow up their works. We have captured several guns since coming here, among them four beautiful twenty-pound Parrott guns, which the Confederates had destined to sink our gunboats and so obstruct the river. We have driven the enemy four or five miles, and a prisoner tells me we have taken Malvern Hill, but the truth of this I cannot vouch for.

The hospitals are on the south side of the river and will not be moved across it until the troops do something decided. Dr. Hayward and I are quartered on the bank of the stream where the breeze is delightful and we can watch the movements of three gunboats and a monitor. Yesterday, by invitation of their commanders, I boarded each of them, and had the pleasure of being present at the firing of one of their hundred-pound Parrott shells into the

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

enemy's earthworks, which were two miles distant; sighted with the most perfect accuracy, the Confederates were driven out each time a shell was discharged, and so prevented from further strengthening their defences.

# OF THE CIVIL WAR

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CAMP NEAR PETERSBURG

August 1st, 1864.

**I** WROTE last time from the banks of the James above Bermuda Hundred.

At sunset of that same day (July 29th) came orders to pack immediately and start on the march. All night we marched, and arrived at our old camp about eight in the morning.

Immediately the Federal batteries opened all along the line, the train was made ready to blow up the enemy's works, and the negro troops drawn up to charge them as soon as a breach was made. These colored regiments were supported by the Fifth corps in reserve. After our batteries had blazed away for an hour or two, silencing many of the enemy's batteries and setting fire to

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

buildings in Petersburg, the crucial moment came and the train was fired. A low, dull boom was heard, followed by the cheers of the assaulting troops. On pressed the negroes in fine order for about twenty yards, when, as if struck by lightning, a panic seized them, and breaking through the lines of the Fifth corps they rushed back helter-skelter, creating such chaos and confusion that a general mob prevailed. The officers even shot the negroes to stop the stampede, but it was useless; the poor fellows were so frantic with terror that nothing produced any effect upon them; and so fizzled our first attempt at mining. Nothing was gained by the terrific assaults of that day, in which we lost many noble lives.

Rumor says that General Bartlett was taken prisoner with his entire brigade, also that he was ordered to the front of the works, where, in consequence of his usual bravery and skill, all his men followed him,



MAJOR-GENERAL BARTLETT





## OF THE CIVIL WAR

but that when there his right and left flanks ran, leaving him unsupported, so that his whole brigade was surrounded and escape was out of the question.

August 8th, 1864.

It is very quiet here in front of Petersburg, but, oh, so hot! And the combined efforts of flies, fleas, and black-flies make life almost hell. At four o'clock in the morning, which means dawn, I am awakened by the buzzing and humming of these busy insects at their pestering task, and this labor does not cease till we poor mortals are again lost to them in the darkness of the night.

Yesterday was Sunday, and all the employees and agents of the Sanitary Commission collected together and read their Bibles aloud, sang psalm tunes, and recited prayers, for I can call it nothing else. The effect was doleful in the extreme, and I never want to repeat such an experience

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

while I am in the army. Let men pray by themselves as much as they please, and read their Bibles in solitude, but not fill every man's ears with their sins and offences.

Mining operations still continue, and the Confederates are mining our works now. They attempted last Friday to blow up one of the forts, but made a miscalculation and did not dig sufficiently far to reach it. On springing the mine their troops made a furious charge, and, before the smoke had blown away to show them their mistake, our lines fell back a little so that the Confederates might enter the works; then we surrounded and gobbled them up. After this they will not laugh so loudly at our failure of last week.

The flies bite so I cannot manage my thoughts and must therefore stop scribbling.

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August 12th, 1864.

We are ordered to pack and march immediately. I only know that the dust is two feet deep.

August 13th, 1864.

Last night we lay on our arms without tents, sleeping as we could.

Here the journal abruptly ends. Owing to my extreme ill health, influential letters had for some time been sent to the Secretary of War, asking that under the pressing circumstances my husband should be relieved from duty. These urgent appeals were finally acceded to, and although it was hard for him to leave his regiment just as the end of the war was at hand, regrets were silenced by the feeling that he would soon be relieved from the intense anxiety which my illness had caused him.

As to when the Twentieth Massachusetts was mustered out is not included in this

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

journal — only the older members, those who had fallen and the very few then remaining, made a deep and distinct impression. The Doctor and I were safely together, he launched in his professional career; and these facts formed the paramount interest of the world we then lived in. Our youth was strong in those days, and all else mattered not. We stood in our present, facing the future, — hopeful, fearless, and determined. Self-absorbed it may have been, but I think this is not rare in the “heyday” of life. The past had flown, leaving much in its wake, — much which at the time was unperceived by us; but our life’s experience has cleared our vision and helped us to know that the ups and downs of this world always mean the onward move toward a future near but inexpressible.

Now many years have passed since this sad time, and yet to call it sad alone seems more than trivial, so slightly was it sug-

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

gestive of all which pertained to civil war. Only upon the hearts of those who suffered loss is written its true and deeply felt history. Deeds of heroism known and unknown, man's greater nature stirred to its depths by the intense conditions, burst forth to the cry of every need. The potent influence of these is above all else the legacy left us, and its proportions, its beauty, its tenderness, whether consciously or unconsciously felt, is somewhere within our depths. We who lived then, and are still here to-day, bear its reflection in many vital paths, which will be felt not only in the lives of our children, but in those of our children's children.

The following is an extract from a Boston daily, found as a clipping among the letters:

“ A great deal has been recently said in some of the newspapers of the duty of wealthy and educated young men [or those whose parents are

## LETTERS FROM A SURGEON

such] to enter the army. Disparaging remarks have been made against this class, and their parents, who are supposed to keep them at home. Certain recruiting officers have taunted them with want of patriotism, saying that when these ' sons of affluence ' shall come forward, the poor and the uninfluential will follow. For what purpose do these men endeavor to excite one class in our community against another? Is it wise? Is it patriotic? They must be ignorant of the facts. Have they forgotten the four Dwights, or the three sons of Judge Abbott, the Reveres, the Stephensons, the two Lowells, one of whom, James, died so nobly in a terrible conflict before Richmond? Have they forgotten the five or six Curtises, the four Masons, the three Crowninshields, the Perkinses, the Bowditches, the Cabots, Jarvises, Amorys, Barstows, Sargeants, Palfreys, from each of whose families two or three have gone into the army? Have they forgotten the long list among whose names are: Quincy, Adams, Choate, Bladgen, D'Hauteville, Savage, Russell and Cary, Higginson, Motley and Stackpole, Holmes, Weld and Pratt, Appleton, Ropes, Perry, Dehon, Hayes, Bangs, Shaw, Mudge, Horton, Morse,

## OF THE CIVIL WAR

Robeson, Forbes, Rand, Clapp, Clark, Grafton, Shelton, Shurtleff, Dalton, Barnard, Haven, Johnson, Hayden, Rea, Loring, Swan, Lovett, Parker, Fisher, and Paine? Have they forgotten the wounds of Bartlett, Horton, Putnam, Merriam, Stevenson? Have they forgotten how bravely young Putnam gave up his life at Ball's Bluff, and Major Howe died in the fight before Richmond; Foster Hodges, who was with the 5th regiment at Bull Run, and Horace Dunn, who left college for the war, both struck down by malignant fever in camp on Hall's Hill? Let those who thoughtlessly traduce Young Boston call to mind what they had done. If any men of the country have made sacrifices, and undergone suffering, these have done it. The few who are left are ready to follow, as the sequel will show."







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